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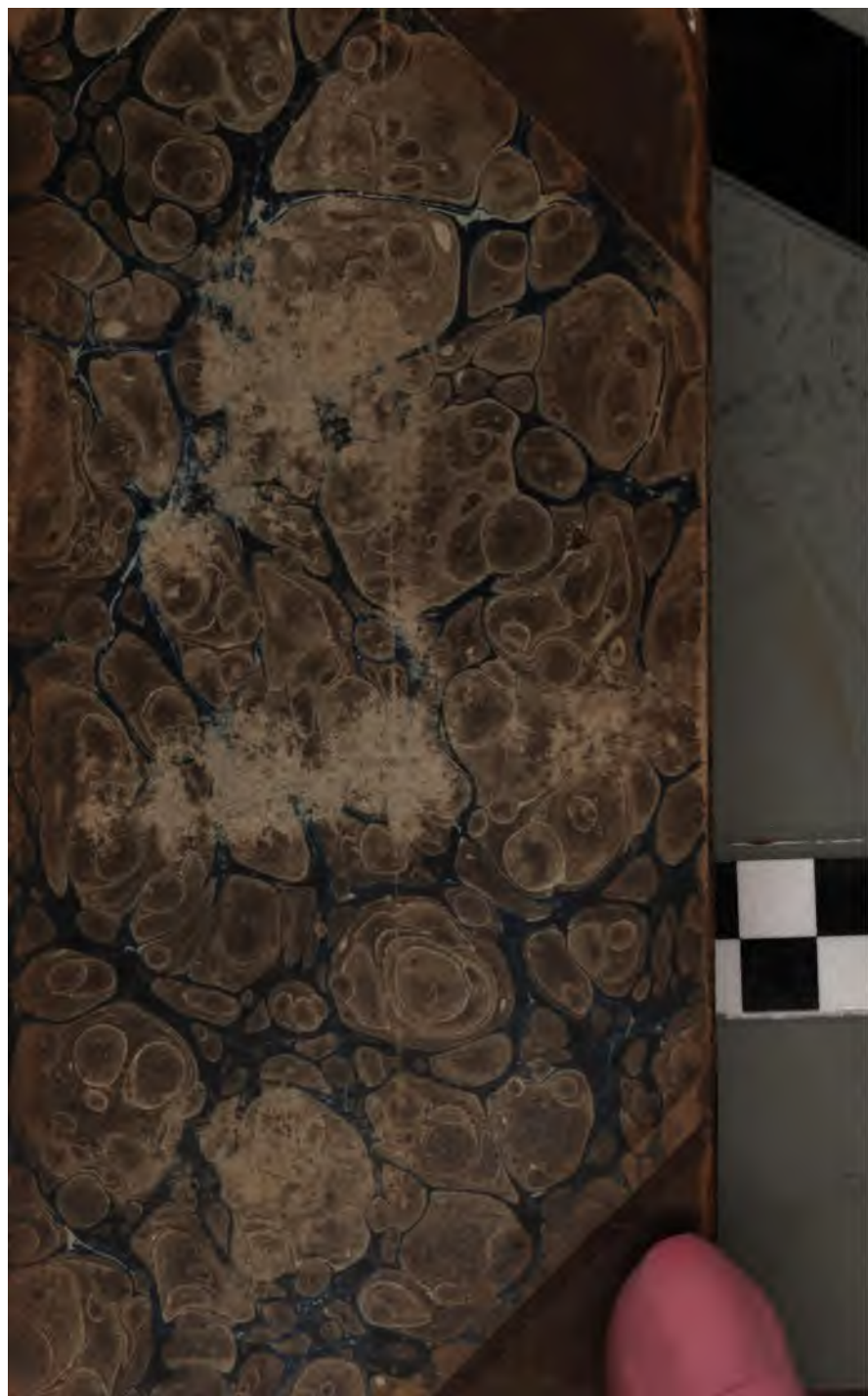
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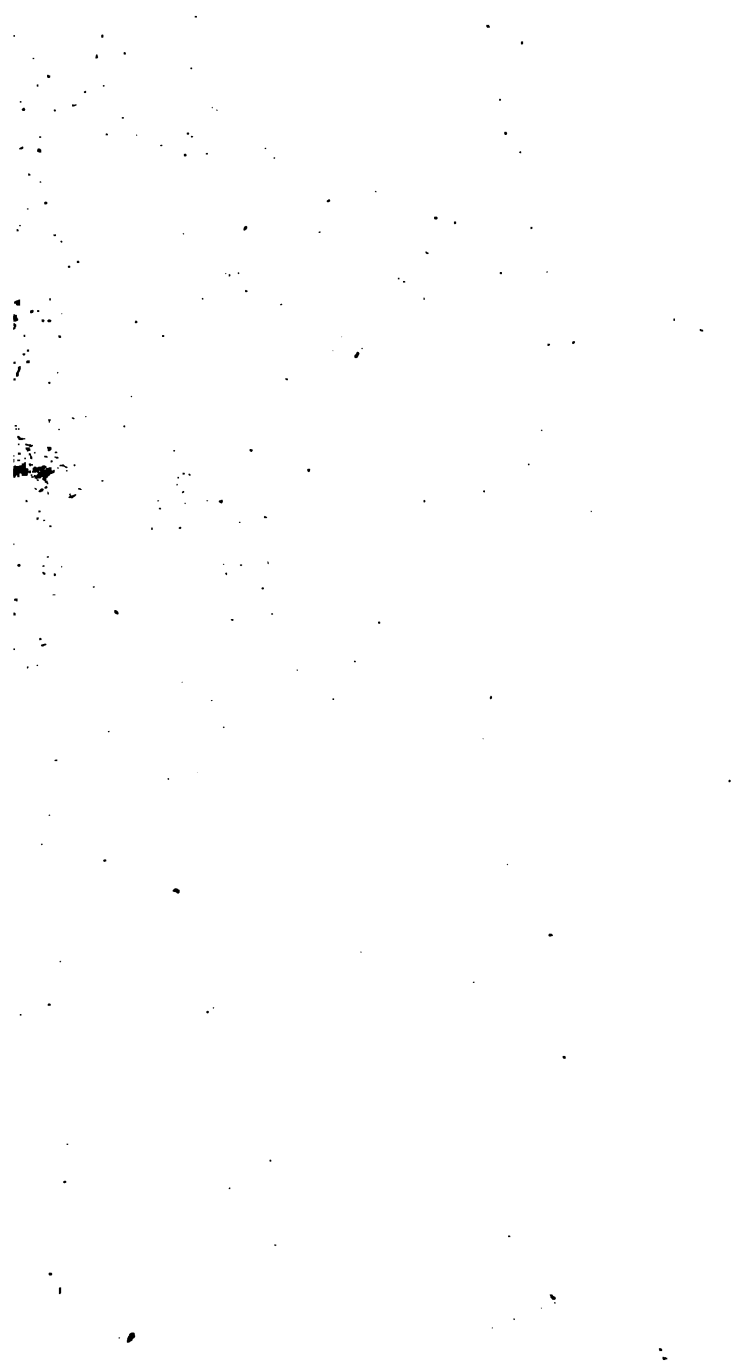




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SPECULATION

A NOVEL



BY THE AUTHOR OF "TRAITS AND TRADITIONS OF
PORTUGAL."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME III.

LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

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SPECULATION.

CHAPTER I.

“AND so you really and seriously believed me to have been capable of loving Mr. Nichols?”—said Lady Clara in a low tone to Harcourt, as she sat screened by the crimson curtain of her opera-box, which was also tenanted on this particular occasion by the deaf old Marchioness of Farrington, and the drowsy Lord Lancaster, to each of whom Pasta warbled in vain, for the one could not, and the other would not hear—
“*You*, who should have known me better.”

Frank laughed: “You married him”——

“*Raison de plus contre l'amour!*” and Lady

Clara flushed slightly; "no woman in the nineteenth century marries the man she loves—impediments rise as thick as motes where the heart is at all a party in the business—poverty, not the least."

"Alas!" and Frank affected to sigh as their eyes met: "is it to me that Lady Clara Ashburnham—pardon me—*Nichols*, I should have said—is it to me that she utters so trite a truth? to me?"

"And wherefore not?" asked the lady with assumed carelessness, but with a slight tremulousness of tone: "I warn you in all friendship, lest you should ever"—

"Lest I should ever"—echoed Frank with a peculiar emphasis; "is this fair? is this kind from you?"

"I know not why you should consider it otherwise;" and Lady Clara found a sudden charm in her opera-glass, and looked long and earnestly at the stage, as though she anticipated Harcourt's reply. She was not disap-

pointed; it was uttered in a whisper, but it brought the blood to her brow and bosom; and though she strove to frown, Frank was nothing daunted by the reception of his sally. "How provokingly handsome he looks!" was her mental ejaculation: "I should not suffer such decided adulation *now*—and yet, why not? I am married"—and she smoothed her brow again into forgiveness.

"Do you see that pretty woman in the box of the French Ambassadress?" she asked; merely to terminate a subject which she felt had gone quite as far as it must, and much farther than it should.

"I know but one pretty woman in London—I see but one;—that tall, black-eyed Spaniard to whom you allude, is Godfrey Esham's bride. And now, I have answered your enquiry, you must reply to mine. You say that I should have known you better than to suppose you ever could have loved — I will not name him, for he is *my* friend, and *your*

husband, and at this moment I might be tempted to couple his name with ——”

“Hush!” whispered Lady Clara, laying the tips of her fingers on his arm; “for heaven’s sake, be more cautious: do you not see that Lancaster is just waking from his doze?”

“Pshaw—do not trifle with me—I am in no mood for trifling.”

The lady bit her lip: but Frank felt his advantage, and resolved to keep it; it was too late to chide: she should have chidden long ago, if she really wished to terminate his gallantries. Harcourt knew precisely how far married women should go in permitting the whispers of their bachelor acquaintance—he knew also that he was quite safe; and it was pleasant and flattering to his self-love to be *l’ami de la maison* with a peer’s daughter. To be sure it was not altogether fair to his friend Nichols, not altogether honorable, but—such things occur every day; and after all, *he* was not the person to blame!

Delicious sophistry! pleasant honey of self-delusion with which to sweeten the keen and sharp edge of conscience; cloying and impeding it for a time, and ultimately stifling it altogether.

"Perhaps you will at least condescend to inform me where he is to-night," pursued Frank after a pause; purposely avoiding all mention of the name of Nichols, while he knew that she could not misunderstand to whom he alluded; thus endeavouring to establish that species of covert colloquy of all others the most indiscreet in the relative situation of the parties.

"Il importe peu!" was the reply; "prosing with papa, or gaming with Ashburnham; or perhaps feasting with some of his city connexions: I have not seen him to-day."

Frank fixed his eyes steadily on her: "And yesterday?"

Lady Clara started: "Yesterday—let me remember—yes, I did see him yesterday."

A peculiar smile flitted over the face of Harcourt; and the words "Poor Nichols!" escaped him as if involuntarily.

It was an invidious ejaculation, and one which it was difficult to resent, therefore Lady Clara did not attempt to resent it; she affected pre-occupation, and lifted the ear-trumpet of Lady Farrington to favor that patient personage with some inconsequent remark. Lord Lancaster became its subject, for he at the moment sprang from the sofa, and left the box.

Lady Clara's eye followed him when he disappeared, as though she almost regretted his departure, though he had not spoken ten sentences since his arrival; Harcourt interpreted the feeling at once—already Lady Clara *feared* herself. It is an evil hour in which a woman suffers that fact to be discovered!

"Will he be here to-night?" Frank asked carelessly, as he possessed himself of her ladyship's vinaigrette, and gently compressed the fingers from whose clasp he withdrew it.

"Here! oh, no—I told him that I had filled my box"—and then, as if suddenly conscious that she had made an indiscreet confidence, she rapidly added, "I *did* expect some friends to join me who have not arrived."

"Of course;" said Harcourt quietly; "I naturally inferred that such was the case."

There was a slight pause, during which the gentleman admired the turn of his own ankle, and the fit of his own glove; and the lady wondered whether he really did think that she expected friends, or if he understood that she merely wished to prevent the intrusion of her husband.

"Verily, Frank Harcourt!" mentally soliloquized that excellent individual, "thou art in a sufficiently peculiar position—in love with one who did but glance like a will-o'-the-wisp across thy path, to bewilder thee, and then disappear;—engaged in a flirtation (to speak leniently) with another, who seems well inclined to lead thee into a worse quagmire

than the first;—and affianced to a third, who is about as loveable as Lot's wife when she became a pillar of salt! But courage, Frank! the wife is a gilded pill—and as for the cara, she is past the age of 'all for love,' and will keep up appearances with the world for her own sake." And he smiled as he remembered that Nichols had undertaken to be his tutor in worldliness—even Nichols himself! but the schoolmaster was abroad, and he needed no more instruction. He had made considerable progress in the world's ways since he quailed under the idea of a marriage de convenance—and no man knew better than himself the value of a striking person, and unabashable impudence:—he was aware that it was often called by a softer name—self-possession, and knowledge of the world—and truly it was both; a self-possession and a knowledge of the world, of which Frank, though he had his own designation for the quality, determined to avail himself to the utmost.

"You are of the Cumberland Harcourts, are you not?" asked Lady Clara, anxious to break in upon a pause, whose extreme awkwardness was becoming oppressive.

"Yes;" replied Frank, who had been ignorant until that moment that Cumberland held a family of the name.

"I thought so—I have heard papa mention Harcourt Castle as one of the finest specimens of Elizabethan architecture in England: there is something very respectable in those ancient baronetcies."

"Very;" acquiesced the young barrister, by no means eager to encourage the topic.

"What relation is Sir Theodore to you?" pursued Lady Clara, believing that the enquiry must be gratifying to the vanity of her companion.

"Sir Theodore—oh!"—and Harcourt was puzzled for a moment: "Sir Theodore—he is—my father's elder brother,—my uncle."

"The black eyes of Mr. Esham's bride, on

which you are gazing so intently, must have bewildered you;" smiled the lady somewhat bitterly; "Sir Theodore cannot be thirty years of age."

"I *am* bewildered, my dear Lady Clara, though not with the dark-browed Spaniard:—the last baronet, I should have said, was my uncle—Sir Theodore is my cousin—but—we are not on terms—I am in a peculiar position—there is a jealousy"——

"Yes, yes, I understand?" smiled Lady Clara; "in the event of Sir Theodore dying childless, you are the next of kin—the circumstance always creates jealousy. What a darling passion is family pride! and in truth it is a very natural one. What can be more spirit-stirring than to see yourself surrounded by the escutcheons of your race, as you ever are in those fine old houses, where your winged dragon, or boar's head, as the case may be, grins down on you from every arch and portal; reminding you at once of the ancient blood which

flows in your veins, and of the gallant deeds of your ancestors by whom those trophies were won !”

“ I have lost all relish for armorial bearings, and heraldic monstrosities,” said Frank carelessly ; “ since one occasion on which I played cicerone at a friend’s place in the country to a party of ladies ; the fine old hall, and the spacious staircase were of black oak, and most elaborately wrought ; the family arms being carved with every variety of ornament that could offer an excuse for their interminable repetition ; the lion rampant supporting an antique shield duly emblazoned with the many quarterings of the family surmounted the great staircase, and the encomiums of an elderly gentlewoman who was on my arm, were at length terminated as she caught sight of these, by the exclamation of—‘ very pretty indeed, very pretty, and vastly ingenious ; but pray, what is the meaning of that monkey playing the harp ?’—So much for armorial bearings !”

Lady Clara laughed heartily “ How perfectly absurd !”

“ I vouch for the fact of the absurdity nevertheless ; it was enough to rouse the buried barons from their stone sarcophagii in the neighbouring church, where they lie with closed visors and clasped hands side by side with their shrouded dames——Pasta is divine to-night !”

The box door opened, and Lord George Luttrell entered : “ How do, Lady Clara, ten thousand congratulations on your marriage ; not met you since—only just arrived from Vienna ;—sad bore to find all the fine women married when one comes home—never met your lord, never heard of him before to my knowledge ;—you must introduce me. Pasta’s tame to-night, don’t you think so ?—How do, Lady Farrington ?—what a bore it must be to be deaf ;—what does she come here for ?—she might as well take a seat in a rookery ;—shouldn’t admit her, Lady Clara, shouldn’t,

upon my honor; she's neither useful nor ornamental—"

Lady Clara thought otherwise.

"That pretty Spaniard with the French Ambassadress would set off your box famously; contrast of style, don't you think so?—midnight and morning, you and she—not a bad idea, is it?—you'd have all the good men in your box,—Lancaster's crazy about her; Esham ran away with her from her father, a surly old grandee, who was going to make a nun of her; quite romantic, wasn't it? He gave her some money, though; after they'd begged pardon, and all that sort of thing, which was lucky; but the old gentleman threatened Esham with a poniard for a considerable time;—great bore, being stabbed by one's father-in-law, and getting no money with one's wife, wouldn't it?"

"There are many bores in this life;" coldly remarked Frank.

"Bores?—oh, yes;—do you know, Lady

Clara, talking of bores, I'm just off for Naples, going out in the suite of the new Ambassador;—my governor insists that I have talents for diplomacy; great bore to leave town in the height of the season, isn't it?—but the Ambassador has a pretty wife, and I want to learn the best method of dressing macaroni."

"Two very important considerations," said Lady Clara.

"Very;" replied Lord George gravely, "they determined me—I could not have endured to be domesticated with a wide mouth and small eyes; or to sit at table, and see a woman dissect poultry with hands as large as the chickens she was disjointing!—and as one likes to learn something wherever one goes, I am glad that I shall have an opportunity of being initiated into the true system of preparing macaroni; it's a bore to go abroad, and then return no wiser than one went."

"Very true," said Harcourt; "and pray

what knowledge may your lordship have acquired at Vienna?"

"At Vienna?—oh, at Vienna I learnt to smoke, sad bore—for it always made me sick; but I was determined to persevere: I was ill for three weeks from morning till night: led the life of a dog;—but I wouldn't be beat, and now I can smoke five cigars before breakfast."

"Most praiseworthy perseverance;" observed Lady Clara, smothering a yawn.

"Mr.—what's his name, Lady Clara?" resumed the lordling: "your caro sposo I mean, he's not here to-night, is he?—ha!—I thought not;—not up to this kind of thing yet, I suppose: well, that's quite as well, for it's a great bore when a man can't get near a woman to speak to her, without treading on her husband's toes—I hate all husbands, except as stop-gaps; they're generally like a gargle, three parts water, and one part vine-

gar ; sure to set your teeth on edge, and very likely to choak you—great bore, after all, husbands—don't you think so ? I'm sure you do, though you don't consider it pretty to own it ;—you'll agree with me by the time I return from Naples, I'm certain you will."

Lady Clara agreed with him at that moment ; but nevertheless one portion of his harangue had brought the blood into her face ; to know that Nichols was food for the superciliousness of a fool !—her husband ; but she let it pass, she hated the very chance of an argument on such a subject ; for she felt that the world's dread laugh would be against her.

" Why you are positively *en reine*, Lady Clara ; the very queen of diamonds ;—Lovell called you just now Lady Golconda, when Count Coranouski, who wants to know every one, enquired who you were,—clever, wasn't it ?—but the best of the joke was that the Pole pointed out Mr. Harcourt, and asked if the very *distingué*-looking person who had been

sitting beside you all the evening, were Lord Golconda ;—how we all laughed——”

“ And what said Mr. Lovell ?” demanded Lady Clara with a rising frown.

“ Oh ! Lovell ?—why he said that by the time Coranouski had been six months in England he would know that the very fact of his having sat so long near you rendered it impossible that he could be your husband—ha ! ha ! he astonished the poor Pole ; and that Lord Golconda was probably in the heart of the mountain, if not in your ladyship’s ; great bore to be bear-leader to an inquisitive foreigner, who is patronized by the prime minister ; I should never survive it.”

“ Is that Count Coranouski with the blond mustache ?” asked Harcourt.

“ Yes, that is he, looks like consolidated milk and water, doesn’t he ?—Great bore, to have such a complexion, isn’t it ?” answered Lord George, forgetting his own at the moment : “ Good bye, Lady Clara ; if I can do

anything for you at Naples, command me; you know I'm always delighted to be of use to you—shall see you again when I return to England, no fear of you now—you are plantée, you know.”— And Lord George disappeared.

Harcourt glanced towards Lady Clara: she was the very personification of suppressed rage; her lip quivered, her cheeks were crimson, and a tear which would not fall, flashed in her eye. This was the very moment when every tone and look of tenderness would sink into her heart's core; when she was writhing under a fool's aimless, intentionless prattle;—smarting from the random shafts of a thoughtless boy.

“ Give me at least credit for patience ;” said Frank in his most honied tone, as he drew his seat farther into the shadow of the curtain, and nearer to Lady Clara, “ that I have so long forborne to press you for an answer to the query which I addressed to you two hours past: dear Lady Clara, do I not merit to have

it answered, were it only for my philosophical endurance of those two hours of suspense?"

"Your query?" said the lady with a slight start, "I have answered all your queries—all, at least, that——"

"That you are inclined to answer?" interposed Frank: "nay then, I shall content myself with the inference——"

Lady Clara coloured painfully. "What inference?"

"Do you ask me?" said Harcourt with emphasis, "retrace our acquaintance step by step, even to its commencement; remember when and where I have looked and listened; how many bright smiles, how many gracious words my assiduities have won for me from time to time;—and do you, can you, dear Lady Clara, ask me *what* inference? Alas! that the cold, callous, calculating necessities of the world should have indeed thus sealed my lips, and withered up my feelings;—yes, I should indeed have known—have felt—have

whispered to my blighted hopes, the solacing conviction that you never could have loved him; that an ambitious father, a haughty name, an exalted station, forced upon you the measure you have adopted;—forgive me that I ever suspected otherwise, my dear, dear Lady Clara; forgive me, I should indeed have known you better!”

“What a shameful flirtation there is going on in Lady Turner’s box between Colonel Daubigny of the Blues, and that pretty little Mrs. Atherton;” said old Lady Farrington, suddenly bending forward; “it is really quite disreputable! I have been watching them this hour—it will be well if it ends in nothing worse—shocking, upon my word!” And the deaf marchioness looked most fearfully correct and dignified, as she wafted her fan to and fro with the deliberation and precision of the pendulum of a clock, perfectly unconscious that her words had stricken deeply into the consciences of both her listeners. And yet Lady

Clara could have thanked her for the interruption; for, ill worded as it was, it was nevertheless well-timed, as it obviated the necessity of her immediate reply to the tirade of Frank; which, as it had originated in an unguarded remark of her own, she could not rebuke, and knew not how to resent. Their eyes met for an instant as the marchioness fell back upon her seat, and those of Lady Clara sank beneath the steady gaze of Harcourt. She felt giddy, and sick at heart. When she idly encouraged his attentions, it was but to feed her vanity, and to gratify her self-love; she was wholly unprepared for the tone which he had so suddenly and so confidently assumed: she was no novice in the world's ways, and she well knew the precipice upon whose brink she stood; she glanced hurriedly and anxiously towards the door of the box; she would have even welcomed the return of Lord George, but he came not; Harcourt gave her no assistance in overcoming her emotion; he seemed

to wait, as if with a desire to see how she would extricate herself from the dilemma in which her own remark and that of the marchioness had jointly placed her; at length she made a violent effort, and turning towards him she said in an unsteady voice:

“Mr. Harcourt, we appear to misunderstand each other—I do not comprehend—I cannot believe”——

“Dearest Lady Clara,” interrupted Frank; “there cannot exist any misunderstanding between us—do we misunderstand the light on which we look, the air we breathe, the sunshine which bathes our brow? As soon could I misunderstand word or look of yours! Hear me without a frown—do you doubt my honor? *Can* you doubt your own? Shame on the thought! then wherefore would you——Come, come,” he added, as he pressed the hand which was gathering up the folds of her mantle, “surely there is no cause for this;—is not Nichols my friend—and are you not—alas! not

what you were—not what I was mad enough to trust that you one day would be—but are you not—dear Lady Clara—are you not—his wife? Not for the wealth of worlds would I bring a shade on that fair brow—the one on my own heart is enough—do not deepen it by your scorn, your coldness. I can bear no more—and surely I deserve some pity, some indulgence—I deserve—I claim it!”

“And I, do I deserve no pity?” asked Lady Clara; “do I deserve no indulgence? is it fair—is it manly in you to make me conscious of my own weakness? to cast back upon me an unguarded remark, wrung from me in a moment of bitterness? Consider the position in which I stand—the step that I have taken;—but I am only adding to the error I would fain retrieve,—I am weakly exposing the wound which, scorpion like, I myself inflicted,—I am, in short, doing that, which beyond all other fatuity I despise,—I am playing the woman. Forget, Mr. Harcourt, if you

indeed, as you profess to do, value my friendship and regard, forget all that has passed this evening."

"When I forget myself!" replied Frank passionately; "it is easy to ask this—to do it were impossible."

A burst of applause elicited by the matchless tones of Pasta, drowned the remainder of his reply.

The next individual who entered the box was the Earl of Somerville: his lordship was unusually gracious; he had just left —'s, he had won largely, drank triflingly, and saw every thing *couleur de rose*; he even complimented the old marchioness on her coiffure, and his daughter on her good looks; and what was of infinitely more consequence to Lady Clara on this occasion, he remained quietly at her side until the commencement of the ballet, and then accompanied her home to supper.

CHAPTER II.

EUSTACE had just settled himself for the evening; his curtains were closely drawn, his reading lamp stood beside him, and his table was covered with manuscripts, which he was collating and arranging for the ensuing number of the periodical of which he was co-editor: he was more than usually indulgent on the present occasion to the writers of love-verses, and the manufacturers of sentiment; he loved to linger on images of beauty, and he found the terseness and energy of his own style strangely softened by vagrant fancies and beautiful imaginings, bordering fearfully on poetry and romance. Eustace smiled as he terminated a

very sonorous period in a political article which he was writing: "Agnes, Agnes, this will never do!" he murmured to himself; "I shall degenerate into a sonneteer, and play the rhymers, if I write with the memory of your black eyes thus before me,—were you at my side, then indeed"—and he laid down his pen to settle the question with himself whether he should truly follow the stream boldly, instead of lingering among the flowers on its bank, when she should be really beside him! Oh, yes—how many combined causes would operate to call forth every effort of his genius then! but meanwhile, the thought of her strangely undermined his industry. He would not own even to himself that he had difficulty in arranging his ideas—he would not throw aside his task, and abandon it for the evening; but he dallied away an hour in luxurious idleness, trying to cheat himself into a belief that he was busy; while in truth the pen moved listlessly and fitfully, and his mind wandered

away from the subject on which he was ostensibly engaged, to dwell on Agnes, and to call up dreams of their future existence. Suddenly Eustace heard a well-known step ascending the stairs; the door opened, and Mr. Brockendon entered.

“Am I not a bold man to beard the lion in his den?” asked the visitor as he drew a chair towards the table; “where he is crouching, surrounded by the mangled fragments of the slain,—how many victims to-night?”

“In truth, my dear sir, I am in no mood for victimizing;” said Eustace: “I have dipped my pen in honey, for I feel so light of heart that I would not hurt a fly.”

“Oh, that I had a work for review!” said Mr. Brockendon gaily; “quarto—nothing less—which I could put into your hand in so lucky a moment. But now I look at you, I can well believe that you are, as you express it, light of heart—I can read it in your eye; and yet your task is not one to engender gaiety; for as you

are obliged to read before you can condemn, I should imagine that your studies are not always of the most edifying description—the efforts of small wits with sublime pretensions—the tirades of slender politicians with substantial self-opinions—the lengthy and uninteresting productions of the dull, the ponderous effusions of the heavy, the vapid vagaries of the vain, and the egotistical fatuities of the ignorant”——

“Be merciful, I beseech of you;” laughed Eustace: “you are indeed applying the scalping-knife most unsparingly—look here, and here”—and he placed before Mr. Brockendon several manuscripts as he spoke. “Should not the perusal of such as these make us bear with the tedium of the less imaginative and talented?”

“I admit it;—here for instance is the autograph of a man whose very name carries a charm with it, and gives promise of talent and originality,—a promise too, which unlike most others, is never broken. I like his warm, ho-

nest out-pourings of the spirit, which are for ever treading on the heels of decorum, but keeping nevertheless, however closely, in her wake; I love his quaint Scotticisms; no man understands better where and how to apply them—I always fancy I smell the heather when I take up one of his works. His prose writings are many of them extravagant, I admit it; but their extravagances are those of untamed genius; and after all, it is so rare a bird, that we should not desire to clip its wings. Then his ballads! warm from the heart, redolent of love and farintosh—just what Scottish ballads should be,—and he sings them too! sings them as he writes them,—needs there more?—And this is the work of fair fingers—another endearing name! the original writer of historical romance in England,—no less amiable than talented; you may well be proud of your connection with that lady: she is of a clever family—brother, sister, we are indebted to all three for many, many hours

of enjoyment; and these two gifted sisters may contemplate their work with the most beautiful feeling of self-respect: for neither the one nor the other has ever written

‘One line which, dying, she would wish to blot.’

Estimable and beloved as individuals; devoted children, sincere christians, and graceful members of society: they are in every point of view that which we picture to ourselves as the beau-ideal of an English woman!”*

“What think you of this author?” asked Eustace, as he held a paper towards him.

“You may consider it strange, but I like him not: you say he is very popular, I know it—so is Punch. I do not like to see sense warped to suit sound; he wears the cap and bells of the modern school of poetry; and the

* Since the above paragraph was written, the grave has claimed the youngest of these gifted sisters: she died as she had lived, beloved by all who possessed the happiness of her acquaintance.

oldest and the gravest of us laugh, when we are in the mood, to hear him jingle them to a tune; but nevertheless we still remember that the cap and bells are there."

"Pass him by; the popular smile will revenge him. Whom have we here?"

"Ha! my fresh-fingered favorite! my painter of green fields and shady lanes; the best narrator of a cottage love tale, and the most graphic delineator of a cricket-match extant. I know her pet dog and her shady parlour as well as though I had patted the one, and occupied the other. The very companion I would choose on a sunny evening, to sit with me under a tree, and drink syllabub,—I am sure she would make one to perfection. But she can do better things than these; witness her tragedies: and then her genius appears inexhaustible; you see her name perpetually, and never too often."

"The next is"—

"One who is as popular as he deserves to be

—a man who writes too much to do justice to himself, because he does it carelessly; but look at the generality of his ballads,—they *must* be good, for they are on the lips of every itinerant singer in the streets of the metropolis—the best test after all of their truth and feeling; to say that they are on the piano forte of every young lady in the kingdom, were to say little,—so are fifty others; so is all the namby-pamby which is wedded to a pretty air, and sold by a fashionable music-seller. I have heard him called a ‘carpet poet’—the designation does him no disgrace—he *is* a ‘carpet poet;’ we domesticate him in our drawing-rooms, with our wives and daughters, for he never costs them a blush; and if he sometimes fails in point, he never does in propriety. He has written for the stage, though I like him less there; he is not at home upon the boards.—But enough of this; I am ill-advised to play the critic before you — ‘’tis your vocation, Hal.’ ”

“Talk to me then of yourself, my dear sir;” said Eustace: “what better moment than this to fulfil your promise of confiding to me the history of that portion of your life of which I am as yet in ignorance? If you still think me worthy of your confidence—if you still desire to bind me to you by a newer and a more intimate bond than even that which now attaches me so deeply to you, do not refuse to give me, here, and now, that full and perfect confidence which may enable me to look upon you as an old as well as a kind friend.”

“I know not why I have so long delayed my story;” was the reply of Mr. Brockendon, as a deep shade of sadness settled on his brow; “yet there are sorrows which are almost renewed by description; and I believe it is from a species of moral cowardice that I shrink from the task—it were difficult to decide what feeling prompted me to volunteer the recital; for you are young, too young perhaps, Smithson, to be the depositary of an old man’s se-

cret: yet I believe you to be only young in years: the mind, the heart, are independent of time—and I feel a morbid desire to retrace to you the few eventful years of my life—I might have found a score of listeners whom the world would have considered as far more fitted to share my confidence, but I know no other ear into which I would pour the tale of my secret grief. It is an old story, Smithson, so old, that you will, it may be, consider it scarce worth the telling; but like the wound of the warrior from whence the fragment of clothing has never been withdrawn, though the hurt be of remote standing, the evil is yet unremedied; still draining slowly, but surely, the life-current which must fail at length. I was not always the person of habit and selfishness whom you now know me, with a smile for my own gratifications, and a sneer for the world's follies: high-spirited, sensitive, and enthusiastic, I was the creature of feeling—the very being, whose lesson of endurance and dis-

appointment was likely to be the most bitter and the most lasting. Need I tell you, that such as I have described myself, I was yet young when I discovered that all my enthusiasm, all my energies, might be concentrated on one object; and that I loved with a devotedness, a passion, at which worldlings would scoff, for they could never comprehend its intensity. But thus it was, Smithson: every thing bright and beautiful reminded me of *her*—every thing repulsive but shewed me how dear an occupation it would be to remove such objects from her path of life—*her* idea was blended, as it were, with my heart's-current. I had no hope, no aim, with which her image was not connected—no enjoyment save in contributing to her happiness. She was beautiful, very beautiful—with that mild, placid loveliness, of all others the most calculated to engage the affections of a nature like my own—large, dark, soul-speaking eyes—it is strange, but none ever reminded me of them as yours

do—at this very moment, shaded by sadness, they seem indeed her own, save that they want that subduing softness which the purity of woman's spirit alone can lend to them. Her cheek was very fair, and yet I could not call it pale, for the warm blood mantled it in a moment, and left it only more beautiful as it departed. Bear with me, as I retrace her image—her graceful, gentle motions, her sweet sad smile, her voice like the breathings of distant music;—I could have knelt and worshipped her—have folded her to my heart, and held her there for ever—I could have welcomed poverty and sorrow for her sake, and thought every suffering light, so long as she shared not in the pang—what could I not have done for her, had she become mine?—But she did not—she never loved me. I was long in believing this: I thought not of such a possibility—hurried on by my own headlong passion, I saw only in the gentle and pitying kindness of her manner the proof of reciprocal

affection—nay, madman as I was, though I marked her eye glisten, and the crimson blood mount to her brow at another voice and another step, I heeded not the warning: in my infatuation, I would not be convinced; and I lived on for months in a paradise of my own creation—an Eden of imagination, which was to be withered by a breath. The bolt fell at last: fortune had been propitious to my wishes; a distant relative, in dying, had bequeathed to me a property of sufficient value to justify me, in the eyes of the world, in offering a home to the idol of my existence: before I possessed the gold, I had scarcely reflected on its want; but now the consciousness of its value came upon me like a bright vision—it might win for me the favor of her parents—it might, it must—for what parent could be insensible to the benefit of his child? I knew that individually I was not displeasing to them, but I had hitherto been comparatively poor—now, however, I was poor no longer; and with a flushed

brow and a fevered pulse, I hurried to tell the tale of my prosperity to Ellena. Then, and only then, Smithson, the bitter, the maddening truth broke upon me; she heard me calmly, kindly, it is true, but with the cold smile which told that no self-gratulation was at her heart—she even extended her hand to me as she murmured out a few words of congratulation; I clasped it in mine, but I did not retain it for a second—it rested cold and nerveless as marble in the fevered palm on which it lay—and yet, idiot that I was! even thus I would not be convinced—and falling at her feet, I poured out the frantic tale of my passionate affection. The start of wonder—the blush of regretful timidity—the large tear which swelled in her mild eye as she listened, convinced me that my ill-fated attachment had been unsuspected as well as unreturned. In vain I pleaded, urged, almost wept; for I felt that the happiness of my existence hung upon the decision of that hour—though she bore with my impe-

tuosity patiently and compassionately, I could work no alteration in her resolve—she forgave a thousand wild reproaches and complaints, for she felt that they were unmerited, and that even as I uttered them, my heart negated the violence of my lips. She spoke to me kindly and soothingly; but I could not listen: my brain burned, and my temples throbbed almost to bursting; at length her pity for my emotion overcame the delicate reluctance of her nature—she thought that she could shew me the utter hopelessness of my suit by confiding to me the hidden secret of her soul, and that the conviction would calm me at once—she did it, generously and nobly did it; though in the effort the blood rushed painfully over her brow and bosom, and her voice faltered in the utterance—how had she mistaken me! how had she over-rated the magnanimity of my spirit! She told me that she loved another—this was the secret which was to teach my fevered pulses to be still, and the warm

blood to course more calmly through the recesses of my heart! She named him too—and I rushed from her presence with the brand of wretchedness upon my brow.—How I hated the gold which I had loved so well but a few hours previously, when I remembered that she had given her heart, that heart for which I would have bartered all, to one on whom the world frowned; for noble, estimable, and high-minded as he was, he was poor, very poor; the son of honorable, but needy parents, and the possessor of a scanty curacy in a remote part of England. Smithson, my blighted hopes had made a demon of me. Had I been worthy of *her* friendship, I should have disposed of my newly-acquired wealth in providing for her welfare: in conciliating the disappointed parents who wrung her young heart by their reproaches and displeasure—I might, I should have done this; but I did it not:—I fled from England: I left her to struggle with her love and her helplessness, when I might have

smoothed her path to comfort and to peace—I knew that her love had ultimately triumphed, but I asked no more. I loved her still, fondly, passionately; but with a selfishness which forbade me to sacrifice one feeling of resentment to her happiness. From that period I have been a blighted man—blighted in spirit and in mind: the little good which I have effected has been ever over-weighed by the sense of that which I omitted to do—and the prayers which I nightly offer up are deadened, for I feel that I dare not ask to be forgiven as I forgive; when even now, in the decline of my days, with my hair whitened by time, and my hand palsied by increasing feebleness, a feeling of aversion creeps over my heart whenever the thought of the calm, and pious, and gentle Edward Eustace comes across my mind—You shrink from me as I make the avowal, Smithson; I do not wonder at your recoil: I almost shrink from myself as I give it utterance.”

“ You mistake me, my best friend ; you mistake yourself ;” said Eustace convulsively, “ you do not, you cannot hate the husband of her whom you loved so fondly, the father of him whom you have rescued from penury and despair.” As he spoke, he drew from his bosom the miniature of his mother, and held it towards his astonished and agitated guest ; “ from the grave she calls on you to revoke that sentence of undying hatred ; from the grave he bids you forget all enmity, and let him sleep in peace beside her whom he loved so fondly upon earth.”

“ Dead !” feebly gasped Mr. Brockendon as he hurriedly possessed himself of the miniature, and gazed fixedly upon it ; “ Dead !—both dead !—and you ?—no, it is some illusion, some waking dream of the over-excited imagination, too wild for reality ;—and yet, it is herself—she who was ever dearer to me than the air I breathe ; my own gentle, forgiving, uncomplaining Ellena ; but now I rave

indeed—his Ellena, the wife of his bosom, the mother of his children, the partner of his poverty, the solace of his sorrows ;—and you, Smithson, you—I am bewildered, stunned ;—explain this mystery—and quickly, for my brain whirls, and I am sick at heart.”

Eustace did explain ; and ere long he was pressed to the breast of Mr. Brockendon with almost frightful energy. “ Her son ! ” he murmured to himself, “ her only son !—madman, dolt, that I have been never to discover this !—and now, it seems so plain, so palpable—the voice, the look, the smile ; all that I loved in her appears to live again—and for me ;—yes, Mortimer, to you I may cling without a fear of the return of that deadly blight which paralyzed the best years of my manhood ; there will be no one to rob me of your affection, to deprive me of your love ; now indeed I have found a resting-place for my declining years, a staff for my failing strength.—Great Heaven ! how many a feeling rushes back upon

my heart!—And is she really dead?—So young, so beautiful, so beloved; could not the grave have found a more fitting inmate? Must I outlive all who were dear to me, and stand alone like a blighted tree, when the tempest has swept away all around me? Dead! then repentance has indeed come too late; and she must have loathed all memory of the man whose valueless love reached not beyond his own narrow self!—too late! too late! I have remained irresolute and supine, when I might have become happy in her happiness, and now she is gone where no earthly aid can reach her; but you, Mortimer, you are yet left to me: in your welfare her sainted spirit may still know joy; from henceforth come to my heart, and be to me as a son. Now indeed I feel why my spirit yearned to you when we first met. Strange, most strange, that we should thus have crossed each other in the wide highway of life; but I am thankful that it is so; the son of Ellena, and the pupil of

the pious Edward Eustace, must be well worthy of all the affection which my care-worn heart can yet bestow ; and wrung as it has been by sorrow, blighted as it has been by disappointment, bowed as it will ever be by a sense of its own supineness, still can it offer a father's affection and a father's interest to Mortimer Eustace."

" I already owe all which I possess to your benevolence:" interposed the excited young man, as Mr. Brockendon paused in violent emotion: " without your helping hand I should have been trodden under foot by the world's crowd: lost in the throng amid which I can now walk, humbly it is true, but safely."

" But her son must do something more: must, did I say?—will do something more; the pupil of a pious and christian father, and of a mother whose graceful nature was full of gentleness and virtue, cannot fail to live honorably and happily; thus for you I have no fears, Mortimer; I have watched you,

thought upon you, tracked you throughout every transaction since I met you first ; before I guessed by how dear a bond we were to be united : I have expected much from you, and you have not failed ; adversity left you as upright as it found you ; nor will prosperity make you less worthy :—I can but talk of yourself to-night ; I dare scarcely glance at her, to-morrow perhaps, but not now, not now——”

Mr. Brockendon rose as he spoke, “ Good night, Eustace, I must go home, and strive in the solitude of my own apartment to comprehend all that I have heard this evening. Surely these things are ordered, they cannot be the effect of chance, after so many years, barren alike of interest and of tidings,—but, good night,—no, not a step ; I must be alone.” And forcing Eustace back into the seat from which he had risen to accompany the old gentleman, as he was accustomed to do, in his homeward path, Mr. Brockendon with a kind but sorrowing smile, slowly left the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE day had at length arrived on which Eustace was for the last time to pass the little wicket of the home of Agnes; her home no longer, for she also was about to quit it for ever. Dreary and uninviting as it was, Eustace loved it, for there he had held the orphan to his heart, and won her young affection. Yet it was with an unclouded brow that he met her, for he felt with the quick instinct of sincere tenderness, that to Agnes the wrenching asunder of the last link which bound her even to *such* a home, must have its bitterness; and that it was to him only that she could turn for comfort in the trial. The

proud and the prosperous may smile at the idea of connecting any, even the slightest suffering, with the thought of departing from a scene of poverty and privation, like the one on which the orphan was about to cast a last look; but here, poor and humble as it was, she had first felt the delight of being beloved: here she had last beheld the protecting friend of her infancy; here she had listened to the sweet sad tale of her departed mother's gentleness and virtue: and there were many memories, trivial and minute though they might be, which filled her eyes with tears, and called a sigh to her young lips, as she collected together her scanty wardrobe to depart. In *this* narrow and cheerless room, she had toiled to earn for her aged relative the few luxuries, and they were few indeed, which her declining years had known: in *that*, she had listened to the words of kindly counsel which had been uttered by her failing voice; her life had been uneventful, but a little world of feeling had

been opened to her *here*.—She paused an instant in her occupation as the conviction crossed her mind, and one large tear fell heavily upon her cheek. But here too she had won the love of Eustace! and the tear was quickly wiped away, for even at that moment his well-known step was on the stair, and the tones of his clear and cheerful voice came like music to her ear. She gave one hasty glance at the mirror, brushed back the clinging curls from her pale brow, and turned with the smile of innocent affection on her lips, to greet him as he entered.

Perhaps Agnes had never until that moment felt that she was beautiful; but now as her eyes fell beneath the admiring and impassioned gaze of her lover, while her cheek crimsoned, and her hand trembled in his clasp, she gloried in the conviction.

“My own sweet Agnes! my beautiful! my beloved!” exclaimed Eustace, as he pressed to

his lips the small hand which had been extended to him: "already prepared?"

"In fact, but scarcely in will: oh! Eustace, how may I one day regret this humble, this mournful home;—here, I have at least been contented, beloved—here I first learnt that I was dear to you:—Eustace, I seem as though I were about to part from an old friend."

"Nay, you must not talk so sadly, my own Agnes; ere long all who look on you will be as friends; dear friends, I trust; but there must be one dearer than all the rest—say, shall it not be so?"

Eustace was answered by a look which shamed the poverty of words, and he was happy.

"Your love has changed my nature, Agnes;" he pursued: "the whole world appears in fellowship with me; and in truth, Providence seems to smile upon my hopes, for a friend has been raised up for me, for *us*, who

will, I trust, shorten the period of our separation, and enable me to provide a happy home for my gentle bride."

"Be not too sanguine, Eustace: alas! I almost fear to hope."

"Why, I must chide you, silly one;" said Mortimer, as he pressed his lips to her pale cheek; "I have no fear—and for your sake, I feel in love with all my kind,—and yet no, not with *all*,—there is one, Agnes; do you remember him? he was beside you when we first met."

"I do indeed remember him;" said Agnes with a slight shudder and a flushed brow.

"To him only can I never extend the hand of amity—I trust that we may never meet again—I would not breathe the same atmosphere with him—I should hate the very earth on which his foot had rested; I shall pursue him to the death with an undying enmity."

"Eustace!" exclaimed the agitated girl, "surely you rave,—you, whom I have loved so

fondly, and ever thought upon as the gentlest and the kindest—oh, Eustace, I know you not in such a paroxysm of passion.”

“ I am rebuked, Agnes; I should not have breathed my hatred to you; and yet, surely you will forgive me: injury to myself I could have pardoned and forgotten, but wrong to you will never leave my memory. But we will not talk of this, love: the world is wide enough for all, and we may never meet again.”

“ Now you are once more my own Mortimer;” said Agnes, as she playfully wreathed her slender fingers in his clustering hair, and bent over him with one of her sweetest smiles: “ my own gentle-hearted Mortimer; that bold bad man will travel through life by a prouder path than we are likely to tread, and thus we shall escape collision—his will be the sunny highway of fashion, ours the shady hedge-row of humble unpretending competency;—why then should we scare ourselves with shadows, like frightened children? has not your Agnes

now got one friend able and willing to protect her from idleness and impertinence?"

"As he would guard his own soul!—And yet, Agnes, I would not see that man beside you again—gazing on you—speaking to you the words of passion."

"You will not, you will not, Eustace:—who should be chidden now? whose are the idle fears? fie upon you for such groundless phantasies—if you indeed love like me"—

"If I do not love more, Agnes—rather say this; are not my thoughts full of you—have my hopes, my ambition, another aim, another object? Is it not the very intensity of my passion which makes me jealous of your happiness? of my own hold upon your heart? And we are about to part, Agnes: your actions will be controlled, your leisure hours invaded, your affections perhaps taxed. Oh! Agnes, a sudden cloud has fallen upon me."

"Eustace, you do me less than justice;"

said Agnes with proud tenderness; "my heart was a willing gift to you, nor can it ever be withdrawn: circumstances may indeed thwart my affections, but never change them. I only ask of you to judge me candidly and fairly, and not to attribute to coldness on my part that which may be the effect of another's caprice. But we are surely tormenting ourselves gratuitously, and I am to blame to treat the subject in so grave a tone: is it not enough that we must part for a time this very day; must we also, by weak and groundless fancies, study to make our parting even more sad than of itself it would be?"

"We will not, dearest, for that indeed were idle: and you will win every heart, Agnes; your gentle beauty will overcome every feeling of that coldness which would chill you in your stranger-home; you will be happy—and for myself, shall I not be blessed in toiling for your sake, to win by my efforts another and a

fonder dwelling-place for you? Yes, Agnes, though we may be for awhile parted, you will be ever present to my thoughts."

As Eustace spoke, Agnes busied herself mournfully but resolutely, in preparing for her departure. She tied on her close mourning bonnet, and concealed her slight figure amid the folds of her sable cloak.

"I am ready now," she murmured beneath her breath, as a large tear fell upon her cheek, and she turned a long, regretful glance on the narrow room endeared to her by a thousand fond though sad recollections.

"So soon, Agnes?" asked Eustace almost reproachfully; "remember that we shall never stand again beneath this roof, hand in hand as we do now; the day is yet young—lay aside your cloak for awhile."

"It is better as it is," sighed the orphan; "I would fain depart calmly from my poor home, and I feel that my firmness is already

failing me. Eustace, on what an unknown world am I about to be cast!" And overwhelmed with the idea, she threw herself again upon the sofa in a passion of tears.

"My own sweet Agnes! my love! my wife!" whispered Mortimer as he sprang to her side, and raised her drooping head upon his shoulder: "will you abandon this reluctantly-offered home? will you resign this cold, unsympathizing relative? will you be mine at once and for ever? Only say that you will be mine at once—mine, Agnes, to-morrow—only say so, and these shall be the last tears which shall ever be wrung from you by doubt. We may indeed be poor in gold, but we shall be rich in love; the world may frown upon us, but we shall be every thing to each other. Speak, Agnes, my own Agnes; shall it indeed be so?"

"Eustace," said Agnes tenderly, "you cannot guess how gladly I would turn from the storm of doubts and fears which now assail me to the haven of your affection; but it must

not be—the finger of the dead has pointed out my path, and I will follow it. The thought of one day becoming the partner of your fortunes, of sharing alike in your pleasures and in your griefs, will uphold me in the busy solitude of my new home: but I must obey *her* bidding. I thought not to have laid bare the weakness of my spirit thus, but I am worn down by sorrow, and you will pity rather than blame me. Urge me not then, dearest Eustace, to a step which would be faulty; urge me not, for too well you know that my own heart would prompt me to comply, did not a sense of right counteract its weakness.”

“You owe nothing whatever to this unknown relative, Agnes;” persisted Mortimer; “absolutely nothing: for her very promise of protection was rather wrung from her, than offered.”

“Hush! Eustace—do not breathe such inferences, I implore of you—my situation is already sufficiently distressing:—the obedience

which I owe to the dead I will pay—would that I could do it more willingly! And now, love, let us depart; we have already loitered too long beside a hearth which is no longer ours, but which will ever be dear to my heart, whether it beat with joy or sorrow.”

As Agnes spoke, she hastily left the room; and Eustace heard her light foot in the apartment above, in which Mrs. Sydenham had died. He longed to withdraw her from a scene so likely to unnerve her already-failing spirits; but a sense of delicacy mingled with awe, withheld him from intruding on her solitude. In a short time she returned; her cheek was pale, and her lip quivered, but she had not shed a tear.

“My mother’s picture, Eustace;” she said with suppressed emotion: “guard it, I beseech you, as the dearest treasure of your Agnes; take it to your home,—you will look upon it with affection and reverence for my sake; I could not bear, much as I shall miss it, to

carry it where cold and scornful eyes might rest upon it,—be it as a cherished bond between us, and let the gentle portrait of the mother remind you as you look upon it of the affection of the child."

Eustace replied only by straining the orphan to his heart; he saw that she had nerved herself for the trial, and he would not utter a syllable calculated to shake her self-possession. After the lapse of a moment, Agnes withdrew herself from his embrace, looked once more around her in silence, and then turning towards him with a faint smile, led the way from her bereaved and solitary home.

CHAPTER IV.

“ HA! ha! ha! ha! ha! so you are fairly caught, eh, Frank?” exclaimed Nichols, as he led the way to Lady Clara’s morning-room; “ a benedict *in petto*!”

“ Hush! hush! my good fellow; there is no occasion to proclaim it to the world, to paragraph it in women’s prattle, to announce it to one’s acquaintance, to expose it to the bavar-dage of the *boûdoir*,” said Frank somewhat pettishly; “ I have no ambition to walk about, ticketted like a haunch of prize mutton, or a cheap gingham. Do be a little more sotto voce in your congratulations, for absolutely I *will not* be proclaimed.”

"As what, Mr. Harcourt?" asked Lady Clara, who had overheard his deprecatory harangue.

"As an engaged man;" said Nichols, disregarding the imploring looks of his companion: "as the successful suitor of seven thousand a-year—as the heart-elected of a fair lady."

Lady Clara bit her lips, and blushed slightly. "Indeed!" she said coldly as she glanced at Harcourt, and remarked that his brow was crimson; "I did not guess—I was not aware"—

"Oh! Frank's wooing has not been a very tedious one;" said Nichols gaily; "he was never made to linger long in doubt: the history of his courtship is"—

"This is really too bad;" said Harcourt in a tone of vexation; "really, Nichols—really, Lady Clara"—

"Oh! there needs no explanation, Mr. Harcourt;" interposed the hostess with a haughty laugh; "nor will I suffer Mr. Nichols to give

one: it is certainly not his province. Suffer me however to offer my congratulations on the happy prospect which is before you—with a wealthy, and, of course, a beautiful bride, (for Mr. Harcourt would never, I am sure, see his table headed by any thing less than a houri;) you will be the admiration and envy of all London. May I enquire when the marriage is to take place? It will be food for the journals for a week—it will rouse us from our lethargy, for we are really stultifying this season. May I ask the name of the fair bride? is it romantic, or right honorable? Are we to be blinded by diamonds, or smothered in roses? Is the heureux ménage to be located in a Piccadilly mansion, or a cottage ornée ‘far from the din of cities?’ Is it to be dash, or devotion? Splendour, or solitude? Knowing what I do of one of the parties, I am naturally curious as to particulars.”

There was a tone of sarcasm running through the catechistical questionings of Lady Clara,

which, even while its bitterness flattered his vanity, nevertheless made Frank writhe. He knew so well what would follow—he could already hear the derisive laugh, the mocking misconstruction, the biting jest.

“I will leave you to tell the tale;” said Nichols mischievously, as he prepared to quit the room; “I should only mar the romance of the story by venturing on the subject in my unvarnished prose, and I have a sick horse to visit;—but, prithee, Frank, be not too eloquent on the lady’s merits—do not raise the anxiety of Lady Clara to make her acquaintance to a pitch of pain, for we cannot now intrude upon her until she has become Mrs. Harcourt.” And Nichols departed.

The brow of Lady Clara was as black as night; her lip quivered, and she turned away from Harcourt in silence.

“My dear Lady Clara;” commenced Frank resolutely, as he rose from his seat and approached her; “if you knew, if you could

guess, how every look of yours thrills to my heart, you would not turn from me with that frown."

"Practice has perfected you in the art of saying polite things, Mr. Harcourt;" said the lady with a disdainful smile; "but I am by no means inclined to forward your accomplishments in my own proper person:—your civil speeches, sir, will be more acceptable elsewhere."

Harcourt cast himself on a chair beside her in affected emotion, and for a time neither spoke.

"If you would so far honor me," at length commenced Frank in a suppressed tone of apparently wounded feeling, "as to listen to *my* version of this affair"——

"What affair, sir?" asked Lady Clara, turning suddenly towards him, and raising her eyes steadily to his face.

Frank shrank from the startling and unlooked-for question: could there be a doubt

as to what 'affair' he alluded? no, surely not: Lady Clara knew full well what he meant; but she had resolved to render the awkwardness of his explanation as great as it was in her power to make it: "My—matrimonial affair;" he stammered out with some difficulty, and then instantly recovering his self-possession, he continued more volubly, "I need not tell Lady Clara Nichols that I am poor—had it been otherwise, then indeed—but it is worse than idle to renew the miserable memories of the past year. As little is it necessary for me to tell her, that those who are gliding down the stream of fashion cannot exist upon the straws which are floating upon its surface—she has herself proved that she is aware of this"—

Lady Clara flushed slightly, but continued silent.

"In this dilemma, what remained for me to do? She, who alone had ever been the object of my heart's idolatry, was lost to me for ever—not by death, for then I could have

vowed myself to her memory, but by marriage with another. Thus situated, dearest Lady Clara," he continued, as he laid his hand tenderly on that of the lady which rested on the cushion of the sofa, "my path was plain: the beloved one of my soul yet smiled upon me as a friend; yet welcomed me to her splendid home, and I felt that I had not courage to forego the blessing of her society—I resolved therefore to make such a marriage as should enable me still to enjoy that blessing. I looked not for beauty—the world contained but one image of beauty to *my* heart, and that was lost to me—I sought not for youth—I cared not for fashion—I panted no longer for proud station nor high birth—I thought only of winning a home, where I might dream securely of my heart's idol, wholly, undividedly:—I wished not that my fancy should be distracted by conflicting claims—I had vowed allegiance in my spirit to my first, my only passion; and I felt that even had I willed it, it was now beyond my power

to break my faith. What then am I about to do?—I will tell you, beloved Lady Clara;—I am about to marry one who is wealthy—who will enable me at least to linger near the Eden which I can never enter—who is old, *very* old—unprepossessing;—but what care I, with a pre-engaged heart, for this? for any thing? You know the truth—and tell me, do you, *can* you, still think that I deserve that blighting frown, that withering displeasure, with which you greeted me on my arrival?”

“I ought not to listen to you, Mr. Harcourt—I must not—remember, I am married—and you, yourself—you will ere long be wedded to another, who will have a claim upon every thought, every feeling.”

Harcourt laughed the bitter hollow laugh of heartlessness—“*My* thoughts! *my* feelings!” he said scornfully; “thought is free—feeling cannot be compelled;—can a priest bind the heart with the hand? can he bestow the soul along with the name? If he can indeed do

this, then shall my wife fetter my every word, my every look, and I will bear all uncomplainingly; but if he have no power to do so, I must still turn to the loadstar of my destiny, as the Musselman turns towards Mecca—yes, here, here must I turn—to you, dearest Lady Clara; and even although you may chide, you cannot banish me; for the world is trumpet-tongued, and unsatisfied with effects, will still pry into causes—but you have *no* cause of displeasure—am I to blame? or will you, can you, blame me? No, no; I read your answer in that kind forgiving smile; I am free to tell you that I love you.”

“No, no;” said Lady Clara hurriedly, but gently; “you must not, indeed you must not: did I not remember that you are a fashionable trifler, and have a select set of phrases for the whole sex, I should not have listened to you so long. Go, go, I forgive you; but you must leave your clasp of my fingers, and find another seat—nay, I am serious.”

“And so am I;” said the unabashable Frank, without moving an inch, and still retaining his clasp of the jewelled hand which he had taken; “and, moreover, you know that I am no trifler—that I have bent the knee at no shrine but yours—and I shall punish you for your apostacy—these little fingers shall remain prisoners until you ransom them by one of the sparkling circlets with which they are now adorned—nay, nay, you cannot release them—you must pay the price.”

“This is really beyond a jest, Mr. Harcourt;” said Lady Clara indignantly, as she still struggled to release her hand.

“Did I not tell you that I was serious?” replied Frank, who felt that if he did not now carry his point, he was ruined for ever with Lady Clara. “Why, one would imagine that I had asked for a barony! Did friend never bestow a gift on friend? or does Lady Clara Nichols imagine that I would ask anything of her which it would be incorrect for her to grant?”

"It might not be incorrect—that is, the fact may of itself be simple—but what would the world say on seeing a trinket, (and such a trinket!) which had once been in the possession of Lady Clara Nichols, on the person of Mr. Harcourt?"

"And do you really believe me to be so heartless a coxcomb," said Frank, "as to *display* such a gift? do you believe that a ring received from *you* will ever encircle my finger, while I have a heart for it to rest against? how little do you understand me yet!"

During this sentimental tirade, Harcourt had been busily engaged in drawing off a little turquoise "forget-me-not" from the hand of the lady, and as the resistance which he met with was but slight, he soon possessed himself of the trinket; and having pressed it to his lips, he drew a slight gold neck-chain from beneath his waistcoat, and passed it through the ring, concealing it once more carefully in its hiding-place.

What a specious compromise with conscience! Lady Clara would not sanction the theft of the ring, because she was a married woman—her objection was over-ruled, for pledges of friendship were common even among the married—next she hesitated, fearful of what “the world” might say—and finally, she suffered a gift, which, yielded openly and honestly, to be worn according to its intention in the face of day, would have been merely an error, or a venial fault, to be perverted from its proper use, and pillowed on the very heart of one whose vanity, and not his feeling, had won the trophy.

“I should like,” said Lady Clara, anxious to terminate a silence which was embarrassing; a silence carefully preserved by Harcourt, and rendered doubly oppressive by his fixed and earnest, almost triumphant, gaze: “I should like to know with how many other ‘souvenirs’ mine is now associated—are there numerous links in that chain of bright memories?”

"It stands alone—or rather, it rests alone:" was the reply: "my heart beats against no other so dear. You smile! do you doubt me?" and he affected an effort to withdraw the chain from its resting-place.

"No, no;" said Lady Clara hastily; "I am no familiar of the Inquisition—I have no wish to put you to 'the question'—I care not to pry into your secrets."

"You care not! cruel Lady Clara"——

"I would say, I have no right."

"Who then on earth possesses it, if you do not?"

"Fie, this is folly!—your affianced bride."

"Talk not, I pray you, of things almost coeval with the deluge—do not conjure up before me a shape as bulky and ungraceful as the Ark, and loathings as numerous as its quadrupedal occupants."

"Are you talking of your destined wife?" asked the lady with a quiet smile.

"I am talking *to* you, that conviction suffices

to make me happy;—but we will change the subject of our discourse.”

Lady Clara laughed: “ If you shiver so prettily before marriage, at the very thought of the carina, what are you likely to do afterwards?”

“ Can you not guess? What do nine-tenths of the married men in town do? run away from home—find a thousand occupations elsewhere—do as they please, in short. But now, the case is far worse—though I am not bound like Jacob to serve seven years for my bride, there are nevertheless indispensable observances which make the milk of my human nature curdle most fearfully;—where the heart is a party, then indeed such observances become happiness, but I have outlived the agency of the heart.”

“ *Reveillez-vous, mes beaux amours!*” murmured Lady Clara with a smile.

“ Alas! they can awaken no more;” replied Frank in a tone of sentiment; “ had they only

faded with the roses of the season, I might have looked for them again with the return of spring; but they pillowed themselves upon diamonds, they fettered themselves with gold, and they have been chilled to death."

"Vastly pretty, and poetical!" said Lady Clara; "'most musical, most melancholy!'"

"And most true. But I am forgiven now, am I not?" he asked, as his dark eyes looked tenderly into those of the lady, and he bent down to press her hand to his lips; "like Adam, when driven from Eden, I am going forth—think of me, dearest Lady Clara, in an hour hence; or rather, I would say, and run all risk of your calling me a coxcomb, think of me *for* an hour hence—I am going to"—he paused, raised his eyes again steadily to hers, and laughed—"to woo!"—his laughter was echoed—"to be tender under the influence of champagne, and agreeable from the inspiration of turtle—to murmur sentiment about spaniels, to play propriety, to 'sigh like furnace,' and

to become, in short, what is termed in the drama, 'a walking gentleman,'—and I shall be eloquent, for I carry a talisman with me."

Frank pressed his hand gracefully on his heart; returned the whispered farewell of his hostess, and departed.

CHAPTER V.

HAD Miss Parsons cherished a doubt that Mr. Harcourt's search for a stray reel of cotton was a mere subterfuge, that doubt would have been removed when he appeared in a full suit of mourning two days afterwards at the breakfast table—positively mourning for Mr. Everard Wilkins! Now, as Miss Parsons mentally argued, if Mr. Harcourt did not consider himself identified with the Wilkinsons, would he have worn black for a person he never saw, belonging to a family with which he was not in any way connected? The good lady had no one to gainsay the validity of her conclusions; and consequently she decided in her

own mind, and perfectly to her own satisfaction, that he certainly would not. There was however one ramification of the subject on which she could not bring herself to feel equally satisfied—she believed that she was no favorite with Mr. Harcourt; and with his influence over the mind of the widow, what would be the probable result to herself? Expulsion from the family circle, beyond all doubt; was her immediate and very uncomfortable conclusion—uncomfortable, for harsh and arbitrary as Mrs. Wilkins certainly was, she had nevertheless become, as it were, a part of Miss Parsons's existence; and the good things in her gift had by long use grown into absolute necessities with the worthy spinster. How Miss Parsons wished that the world did not contain very young men, handsome young men, and above all, needy young lawyers—how she wished that Mr. Frank Harcourt in particular had never been introduced by stupid

Mr. Marsden in Baker Street—or, that Mrs. Wilkins had been less susceptible. Here was the result of the turtle, and the café noir! And the good lady wound up her cogitation by sighing to herself that very common-place ejaculation—who would have thought it?

But Miss Parsons might have spared herself all these melancholy musings, for in becoming the husband of Mrs. Wilkins, the young barrister had no intention of becoming her companion also; the situation of Miss Parsons had indeed, through his means, been a sinecure for the last few months, but the time was approaching when he would no longer encroach so largely on her privileges—Mr. Harcourt in the pursuit of a wealthy wife, and Mr. Harcourt in possession of seven thousand a-year, would be two very distinct individuals. It was a sad pity that the bridegroom *de jure* and the companion *de facto* could not conveniently come to a full understanding on this point—

what hours of sad anticipation it would have saved poor Miss Parsons!

“ ‘ Happy they, the happiest of their kind
Whom gentle stars unite,’ ”—

murmured Frank, as he took the hand of Mrs. Wilkins to lead her to a seat, and then placed himself beside her; “ I am an early visitor, my dear madam, but I trust nevertheless a welcome one—Miss Parsons, I’ll trouble you to close that door at my back: I never can survive a draught.”

“ Confirmation strong” was this to the suspicions of Miss Parsons, but she closed the door in silence, and resumed her seat. Mr. Harcourt had hitherto waited upon himself, or employed a servant.

“ I am flattered by your consideration;” said Mrs. Wilkins as she glanced at Frank’s mourning habit.

“ Consideration!—my dear Mrs. Wilkins, I esteemed it a duty not to appear before you

otherwise than as I am; pray do not talk of consideration."

"Humph!" coughed Miss Parsons; but no one heeded her.

"You do not eat, Mr. Harcourt; you are not well;" said the widow anxiously, "is there any thing that I can procure which you would prefer to what is before you. I am always wretched when I see people refuse their breakfast."

"I desire nothing but what is before me;" replied Frank with emphasis, as he turned his large dark eyes full upon the lady: "*I can* desire nothing more; but do not be wretched on my account, I am so perfectly the creature of feeling and impulse, that I cannot compel myself to anything." He did not consider it necessary to mention, that in order to play off this pretty piece of sentiment with comfort to himself, he had previously breakfasted at home. "But you, my dear madam, you, who are so kindly susceptible of the well-being of others, you must allow me to forbid your

being thus careless of yourself." Mrs. Wilkins was about to deprecate the idea of her appetite being more vigorous than his own, but the words were arrested on her lips by the termination of his address: "Remember, my kind friend, that we do not live only for ourselves, there are cases where we are called upon to take care of our health for the sake of others to whom we are dear." And he concluded this exquisite theory, by compelling the lady to its practice.

Meanwhile Miss Parsons dispensed tea and coffee, and was suffered to fast or feast as she pleased: the wretchedness of the hostess did not extend to her; and as she wisely considered that it was as well to enjoy the good things of life while they were still attainable, she quietly went on with her meal undisturbed by sentiment which she could not comprehend, and feelings which she had never experienced.

Breakfast was over; and Mrs. Wilkins found fifty little commissions for Miss Parsons

to execute—out-of-door commissions; and it so chanced that the shops lay very wide of each other; in fact Miss Parsons as she tied on her cloak, slipped her feet into her clogs, and clutched her umbrella, looked with some dismay at the clouds, which like heavy curtains of black, seemed as though a touch would bring them down about her ears.

Frank smiled as she withdrew from the room: he glanced from the widow's sables to his own; and could have laughed as he remembered that they were then about to enjoy one of those tête-à-têtes so coveted by lovers. He was at a loss how to commence the colloquy; and he sat for awhile gazing upon the lady, and internally hoping that she would relieve him from his dilemma; but no, there he sat, and there sat Mrs. Wilkins, her head averted, and her eyes fixed on Zoë who was panting for breath, between heat and repletion, at her feet.

“This will never do!” was his mental eja-

culatation: and edging his chair nearer to that of the lady, he tenderly pressed her hand, and began in a deprecating tone, "Have I offended past forgiveness?—and was the tender solicitude which you expressed for my welfare merely intended to impose on a third person:—speak, my dear, my kind friend—speak, and assure me that I am needlessly tormenting myself."

"Offended!" murmured the lady, "why should you have offended?—surely you cannot have such a fear."

"But your silence—your averted eyes——"

"Do you wonder that I am silent; my dear Harcourt?—that in the very happiness of my heart at having won a love like yours, I rather shun your gaze."

"Amiable candour!" sighed Frank; "how have I merited such a destiny!—and will you indeed be mine?—mine before the whole world? If a life of care and devotion can indeed repay the gift of this dear hand——"

"If it can repay it?" echoed the lady with a tender smile; "what would it not repay? can anything in this life bear comparison with a pure and disinterested affection?"

"I should think not;" said Frank, but he was by no means certain of the fact.

"I shall place all that I possess unhesitatingly in your hands, my dear Frank; I should be unworthy of your preference did I withhold anything from your generous devotedness. My own wants are few; my own tastes are simple:—in these respects I feel that you resemble me."

"Wonderfully!" ejaculated the young barrister.

"There is one point on which I may as well consult you at once. Miss Parsons has become inquisitive and taciturn of late; would it not be as well to let her visit her friends? She has been with me nineteen years, and during that time she has never left me for a day: I could not spare her: I was an isolated being—

and the dogs too, they required attendance; but now I shall not miss her in your dear society, and Harrison shall be for a time my master of the hounds." Mrs. Wilkins laughed at the conceit; so did Frank; but he nevertheless had no wish to see Miss Parsons depart from Baker Street, and leave the widow wholly on his hands: no, no;—that would never do; and he had a shrewd suspicion that when once the companion had left her present home, it was never intended that she should return to it. Frank however had decided otherwise: Miss Parsons would be as necessary to his establishment after his marriage as the hall lamp. She must be the safety-valve for the lady's ill-humour. Who would listen to her complaints of club-houses, her murmurings against routs, and operas, and races, and sailing-parties, if Miss Parsons were dismissed? To whom could she unfold her disappointment and her griefs, if the patient, the

practised companion were not at her side to listen ?

All this flashed across the mental vision of Frank with the speed and force of electricity ; his wife would see so little of him that she must have some one with her to preserve her from the attacks of the blue devils : her venting her anger upon him was so totally out of the question, that some obliging individual must be paid for enduring it ; and who could be so well calculated for the post of honor as she who had so long and so patiently filled the situation.

“ Nay, nay, do not discard poor Miss Parsons just at the moment when she may be made so very useful ;” said Frank : “ there are ten thousand little services which she will perform to admiration ; and thereby save you a world of thought. You will be worn to death if you have to arrange every thing for every body ; I will positively not hear such a scheme

talked of; if Miss Parsons has lived for nineteen years without seeing her friends, her sensibilities must be pretty well stagnant by this time, and she will not suffer from a prolonged separation."

"As you please;" replied Mrs. Wilkins, "it is a matter of so little importance that there is no merit in ceding the point."

How wayward is human nature! How often do we sigh for that of which the very prospect of possession afterwards inspires dread! It was thus with Frank. If he had, while he considered the hand of the widow unattainable, suffered himself at times to dwell on certain deficiencies both of mind and manner; how much more palpable did they become, how much more frequent and glaring did they appear, when he reflected how soon he would be called upon to blush for them in the person of his wife!—his wife!! And was this to be the termination of all his mental sketches of Mrs. Frank Harcourt? Of the

loved one who was to be pillowed on his heart, and guarded as the apple of his eye? Yes, truly, the important words were said—the decision was made—his fate was decided. Verily, Frank Harcourt, it was a pill which required gilding!

How very seldom does our after-life embody forth the bright visions of our youth—persons, places, circumstances, all alike fail in their turn to fill up the outline sketched by our young fancy: or, if indeed they sometimes do so, it is with such deep and fearful shades, that we scarcely recognize our original idea. Perhaps it is better thus, for youth is a wayward theorist; and the poetry of early life would blend but badly with the realities of the world. If every heart could inhabit its own Eden, society and social usages must stagnate; and worse than all, we should forget that we are mere travellers in a strange land; and instead of following the highway leading to our destined country, we should one and all turn

aside from the path, to linger in sunny spots more congenial to our tastes; or loiter idly among flowers and perfumes, until that night on which morning rises no more overtook us in our wanderings, and found us unable to pursue our proper course. Many of us have an ingenious method of rendering the path of life narrower and more tortuous than it really is, by embracing fantastic and empty imaginations of our own—holding a veil before the sun which is willing to shine upon us—and, to use a homely simile, going through every kennel the longest way. Frank was one of these; as he left Baker Street, he began to commiserate his own fate:—young, handsome and ambitious, his aspiring nature had served him no farther than to win for him the love of Mrs. Wilkins! He dwelt not on his own determined agency, but he amused himself by cursing his unlucky stars that Fortune had done no more for him. When he endeavoured to reflect only upon the advantages of his posi-

tion, he found it impossible not to recur to the penalties which were attached to it; like a paper kite, he no sooner soared into the clouds, than the unlucky string drew him back again to earth.

CHAPTER VI.

“UPON my veracity, Lancaster, you are playing your cards very badly: if Lady Clara is so soon to have an attentif, you have a prior right to be the man; only last Saturday you left her box as though you felt that you were *de trop*, and that Mr. Somebody, who is no one knows who, and who comes from no one knows where, had the game in his own hands.”

“He was welcome to it:” was the laconic reply.

“He’s a handsome fellow;” pursued Lovell; that must be admitted on all hands; but the intimacy is certainly a very remarkable one—I wonder Nichols does not interfere.”

"I understand he is Nichols' bosom friend;" yawned Lord Lancaster.

A general laugh followed the remark.

"It looks extremely like it, certainly; said Neville: "I called the other morning as soon as I was off guard, with some new music that I had promised to Lady Clara; she was denied; but Harcourt's cab was at the door, and the puppy had the assurance to nod to me from the very steps as he walked into the hall, without asking a question."

"A lesson for *you*, Neville;" said Lovell drily: "always hold your tongue, and take every thing for granted: if you once begin to ask questions, it's all over with you. Harcourt was determined that Lady Clara should be at home, and at home she accordingly was, *to him*,—you gave her the opportunity of deciding for herself, and you were shut out,—the inference is palpable."

"I never held my tongue in my life;" said Lord George Luttrell; "I always said what I

thought from a boy—it's a bore not to say what you think, isn't it? I remember some years ago that I had an old maiden aunt, Lady Winifrid Wetherall, as rich as Croesus, and as ugly as Charybdis—she always said I was very candid—liked me for it—great bore when people don't always like you for the same thing, isn't it? One day she asked me what the world thought of her—told her directly.—She died soon after—great bore for her to die just then, for she hadn't time to forgive me;—left her money to endow an hospital—tore up her first will, and disinherited me.—Great bore! have hated old maids ever since—no wonder, is it?"

"Another illustration of my theory;" said Lovell: "though I started it on very slight grounds, Luttrell has at once strengthened my position. Depend upon it, there are many accomplishments much less difficult of attainment than learning when to hold your tongue; yes, and there is as decidedly and as unquestion-

ably great self-denial in practising the art when known. A few ill-judged and ill-timed words have frequently marred a man's fortunes, both morally, socially, and politically; lost him his mistress or his election; and taught him a lesson which he has remembered throughout existence. How commonly do we hear the exclamation—'oh! that I had but held my tongue!'—How seldom do we profit by having heard it."

"Lovell is quite oracular," whispered Lord Lancaster.

"I have earned the privilege of being so on this point," said Lovell; "I paid pretty dearly for the lesson."

"Let us have the proof;" exclaimed Neville, "and you shall be free to prose another hour by the clock."

"Ten minutes will suffice.—Some years ago I put up for ——: I was tolerably sure of my election, for I had agreed to pay a round sum for the honor of representing the 'free and

independent electors' of that distinguished borough, in Parliament. When I arrived in the town, they gave me a dinner; and the mayor introduced me to the corporation, and the corporation introduced me to the freemen; and I presented them with a fat buck, and they very condescendingly accepted it: and the mayor proposed my health, and made a speech, setting forth my perfect fitness for the senate and the council; and I returned thanks, and made another, in which I perfectly coincided in all the sentiments and opinions of the worthy and intelligent chief magistrate: and the good people of — were delighted with me, and with my modesty, and my oratory, and the liberal price which I had consented to pay for the privilege of calling them my constituents: we were mutually pleased, and

‘ All went merry as a marriage bell.’

But the hours sped on—the mayor was a bachelor; and we drank more wine, and made

more speeches; and the less sober we became, the more determined we were to be oratorical: and it so chanced that at length, overcome by ambition and bad claret, I rose once again to speak, and I did speak!—somewhat confusedly no doubt, but nevertheless only too intelligibly. I had, in the hilarity of the table, suffered the point of my situation totally to escape me; my principles (for I *had* principles, though I then sacrificed them to expediency), were strongly in favour of purity of election. I spoke as I felt—I discoursed volubly and earnestly for full half an hour on bribery and corruption, venal representation, and the enormity of rotten boroughs! Mayor, aldermen, and electors, all stood, or rather sat, aghast: my speech was honored at its conclusion, like the toasted memory of a dead monarch, with solemn silence; and I believe that I ultimately fell prostrate on my laurels, for shortly afterwards I was carried home to my hotel to bed.”

“And what was the result?”

“Just such as might have been anticipated: I rose the next day with heavy eyes and throbbing temples, and just crawled down to the Town Hall in time to hear my opponent, Jeremy Slender Esquire, whom I had outbid for the borough, unanimously elected.”

A volley of laughter succeeded the narration.

“The joke is a good one, doubtless;” said Lovell; “nevertheless, had I known when to hold my tongue, I should have secured my seat.”

“Your mischance reminds me of an anecdote,” said Neville, “with which I will strengthen your theory.—When I was at Oxford, the Professor of Oratory was Mr. C****. One of the conditions annexed to this professorship is, as you are aware, celibacy: nevertheless Mr. C**** wooed and won a fair lady, whose attractions were too great for his prudence; but the worthy professor did not call upon his academical friends to inform them of

what he had done; on the contrary, he quietly pursued his usual routine of duty, and during four years his marriage remained unsuspected: at length the circumstance transpired, and an official personage waited upon him to ascertain the fact. ‘Mr. C****,’ said the somewhat unwelcome visitor, ‘I understand that you are married, and have been so for some time.’

The professor bowed.

“‘Pray, sir, how, after taking such a step, has it occurred that you have held your professorship?’”

“‘Simply,’” was the reply, ‘because I have held my tongue.’”

“The anecdote is a good one”—observed Lovell.

“And authentic;” said the guardsman.

“I have no doubt of it; and it is but one instance among many, of the truth of my position. There are men who affect to think that all earthly wisdom consists in a set of well-assorted phrases and startling opinions,—but I

maintain that there may be even more wisdom in knowing when to hold your tongue."

"What a pity it is that our club does not boast a reporter;" said Neville: "really we are quite edifying this morning."

"I'm very glad it doesn't;" remarked Lord George with a self-gratulating nod; "great bore to have all one's remarks registered in black and white—one can't always talk for print; and then one looks so devilish silly on paper."

"But you, Luttrell, who are always ready to 'point a moral and adorn a tale;'" said Lovell, "you have no cause to deprecate the interference of the swift-fingered stenographers."

"It's hard upon a good many individuals though;" said the lordling compassionately—"Lancaster, for instance, who's a bad talker—it would be a great bore for him."

"Not a whit;" laughed Lovell; "the splendour of his sentences compensates for their

scarcity: it is your pie-bald conversationists who would be the sufferers—your men of pet words and silly phrases.”

Lord George looked pleased: he was one of those unlucky individuals who are always pleased in the wrong place, and he laughed *with* those who were laughing *at* him, in his own peculiarly anti-sensible way.

“Got a lame horse:” said the lordling, after a pause sufficiently long to enable him to seize a new idea; “can’t go out of town, though the governor has written to say that I’m wanted in Hertfordshire—obliged to see Raffle three times a day, for fear he should be neglected—great bore to have a good horse neglected, isn’t it?” As he asked the question, Lord George was particularly attracted by his own reflection in an opposite glass, and he continued without waiting for a reply—“Grimsley may say what he likes about Nugee, but after all Buckmaster’s the man for a waistcoat—a great deal depends on the waistcoat,—

bore to have an ill-made waistcoat." There was the silence of a second, and then he concluded by saying, "Very difficult to get a match—don't know of a match, any of you, do you?"

"What do you want?" asked Lovell, looking quietly up from a newspaper which he held in his hand, "is it a wife or a waistcoat?"

"Not a wife;" said Lancaster; "there he could never meet with a match: 'none but himself can be his parallel,'—*le monde ne contient pas de quoi!*"

"Not a waistcoat," followed up Neville, "for he said yesterday that he had one for every day in the year—like Fonthill Beckford's porcelain breakfast cups."

"A horse, a horse;" broke in Lord George, "a match for Raffle—I'm going to start a mail phaeton—I'm sick of cabs: tailors go out now-a-days in cabs to take measures—great bore to be taken for a tailor."

"Very great bore:" responded Lovell;

"now *I* run no such risk, for I'm never sufficiently well-dressed—it is quite another thing with you."

"Harcourt is one of the best dressed men in town;" said Neville: I have often remarked it—always fitted to an inch."

"I suspect that he is just now;" remarked Lovell in his peculiar manner.

"Revenons à nos moutons"—laughed Lancaster from the sofa.

"Still harping on my daughter;" followed up the guardsman.

"O—h!" ejaculated Lord George, like Kemble taking Macready's joke, when the smile had left the lips of his companions, "you mean Lady Clara—great bore to have such a wife."

"As how?" asked Lovell.

Lord George was posed for a moment; for though he sometimes knew what he meant, he could very seldom express it: "So soon after marriage, you know."

"To have such a wife so soon after marriage?" repeated Lovell enquiringly.

"Yes, flirting, and all that kind of thing"—Lord George had just caught another idea by the tail;—"preparing for her appearance at Doctors' Commons."

"Fie, fie, 'no scandal about Queen Elizabeth!' I hope," exclaimed the guardsman; "a pure platonic!"

"C'est le metier des femmes;" drawled Lancaster.

"I'll bet a hundred to ten that she starts with Harcourt;" said Lord George.—A bet is always an Englishman's method of bolstering up a shallow argument, or supporting a defective position.

No one spoke.

"A hundred to five"—repeated the lordling.

"A safe bet—we're none of us young enough;" said Neville as he drew on his gloves: "every editor of a morning paper

has got the important paragraph ready written by this time."

And with this concluding compliment to the propriety and prudence of their common friend, the parties separated.

CHAPTER VII.

" I MUST be permitted to remark ;" observed the Countess of Blacksley in that tone

" As who shall say ' I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark ' "——

" I must be permitted to remark that the sacrifices which my niece Lady Clara Nichols has made, should entitle her, and moreover certainly do entitle her, to make a stand on this point."

" I am at a loss to understand the nature of those sacrifices, I confess:" said Nichols quietly, as he glanced round the apartment.

" You are obtuse, sir;" sneered the coun-

tess; "has she not sacrificed her rank in life—has she not lost caste?"

"Really, madam;" replied the husband, who had become sufficiently inured to those needle-pointed sarcasms, which from their constant recurrence at length merely pricked, having lost their power to wound; "I am so utterly wearied by all the cant of caste, and rank, and exclusiveness, that I now hold it at its proper price; and you must pardon me if I assure you that it is a very paltry one."

"Mr. Nichols brings every thing to the same test;" remarked Lady Clara with a contemptuous gesture;—"he has a mental ledger, and an intellectual day-book."

"This is from the point however;" resumed Lady Blacksley, "let us understand the thing at once:—do you, or do you not mean, Mr. Nichols, to leave to my niece and Lord Somerville's daughter, the full liberty of action."

"I mean to leave to your ladyship's niece

and to my wife, only such liberty of action as shall be respectable for her, and satisfactory to myself——”

“Respectable!” echoed Lady Clara with a shrug, and a glance at her aunt.

“Yes, madam, I repeat the word, respectable—it is one, the meaning of which, if I am to credit the common gossip of the clubs, you are rapidly forgetting; I know not how far such may be the privilege of a peer’s daughter, but it is in no degree that of a citizen’s wife; if you merit the light tone and the lighter words in which you are now mentioned, I am, in some points, perhaps, the person to blame; should the tone become more decided, and the words less guarded, yours shall be the fault. Once for all, we must understand each other: Joseph Nichols may have been a weak, but he will never be a good-natured husband!

“You run no risk of such an implication.”

“I am glad of it: be assured that should the designation be applied to me, it will prove a misnomer.”

“And your resolution is, that Lady Clara shall leave town, now, in the height of the season?” said Lady Blacksley half interrogatively; “may I enquire what reason she is to advance for such a proceeding?”

“Her desire to oblige me, if she be at a loss for a better.”

Lady Clara laughed bitterly.—“Such a reason would be inadmissible from the simple fact of its gaining no credence; shall I write myself a simpleton?”

“As you please.”

“Understand, Mr. Nichols;” she resumed impatiently, “that if—mark you, I say *if* I consent to this antipodean arrangement, I shall remunerate myself for the sacrifice; I shall fill my house with guests, never stir without four horses, and make your establishment the wonder and the gaze of the county.”

“I can countenance no such empty and idle follies; I owe a duty to the neighbourhood which I will fulfil; while, as certainly, I will not

suffer the scum of—but I am wrong to adopt a bitterness of tone where the subject is so unworthy of emotion; I appear harsh, dictatorial; I am sorry that such a necessity is thrust upon me; and I have not yet lost the hope that we may still learn to think alike on these points."

"Never!" said Lady Clara vehemently, "and it is well that I have been forewarned of the state of exile to which you had destined me; but you are deceived, sir, in your estimate of my forbearance;—do you think that I married to be shut up for hours with you tête-à-tête in a gloomy country place?—do you think that I could do it?—What have we in common?"——

"Nothing;" said Nichols placidly.

"The idea is preposterous!" ejaculated the countess disdainfully: "inouie! barbarous! If you are determined to go, Mr. Nichols, why, go you must; but Lady Clara does not wish to leave town."

"Say, madam, is resolved not to leave town;" interposed her niece.

"Then the affair is decided;" said the countess with perfect sang froid.

"It is;" acquiesced Nichols: and turning towards his wife, whose cheek was yet flushed, he added gravely, "But remember, Clara, that should you one day look back upon the arrangement of this hour with regret, it is of your own making; heaven is my witness how little I have sought—how little I had foreseen such an utter wrenching asunder of every tie between us——"

Lady Clara looked up inquiringly, and the countess interposed with an uneasy laugh; "One would really imagine that you were going to turn hermit, Mr. Nichols, and live and die among the oaks and elms."

"No, madam, I have no such design; but I shall carry away with me the consciousness of having no longer a home: of having forfeited all chance of ever possessing one; I

shall know that the brand is on me, and that I am fated to wander unloved and unloving through the crowd of life—I can never be fooled twice. If Lady Clara and myself part in our present spirit, in that spirit only shall we ever meet again. She may share alike my purse and my name, but those are the only things which we shall ever again have in common. I am now fully awakened from the dream which has so long deluded me, and I am not one to be misled twice by the same phantasy. If, on the contrary, she is willing even now to see the justice of my determination, and to submit to it, I will be the first to bury the past in oblivion. It is for her to decide.”

“Submit! determination!” echoed Lady Clara, roused from her temporary astonishment; “these are most matrimonial words, it must be confessed—new to my ears, and not more new than disagreeable. I have never yet learnt to submit, and I am unlikely now

to study the art. Your ladyship will concede, I am sure, that Mr. Nichols adopts a novel method of persuasion: one as high-bred as it is conciliatory."

The countess shrugged her shoulders, and moved towards the window.

Mr. Nichols also rose from his seat, and approaching his wife, he addressed her in a tone of cold courtesy, through which a slight sadness was at times perceptible, though he struggled to suppress it: "Pass over the ill-chosen terms which have so disgusted you, Lady Clara; there was little occasion for me to deepen your scorn by words: my life has been one of such uneventful character, I have been so long accustomed to unvarnished honesty of speech, that perhaps I am somewhat deficient in the worldly tact which spreads a smooth surface over the roughness of original meaning—I will word my expostulation anew, and willingly; for, believe me, it is not easy to stand by with a quiet pulse, to contemplate

the subversion of your dearest hopes. We have probably both been self-deceived: our anticipations have been suffered to outrun our reason: our eyes are now partially opened; but shall we, therefore, throw from us our still-remaining prospect of domestic peace?"

"Domestic peace is the chimera of young ladies and gentlemen in their teens;" flippantly interposed Lady Clara: "we are beyond its influence."

"I fear we are;" replied Nichols, with a sigh which proved the utterness of his conviction of the fact. "Yet if there were still a chance, however remote, however slight—but I will hope that there is one—Lady Clara, for my sake, for your own—nay, do not smile in scorn at the appeal, for remember that the world is adder-tongued, and even when the wound is cicatrised, the poison remains—for both our sakes, then, pause ere you determine to turn that tongue upon each of us; it is a sneer and a jest now—bitter enough

to bear even thus! but should it deepen, it will be a jest no longer; it will be a blight, a polluting breath which will poison the very springs of existence—trust me, ill-fame is as the Upas-tree, which withers all within its influence.”

“You romance, sir.”

“No, Lady Clara—I am too sick at heart to romance:—once more I warn you that if we now part, it will be for ever.”

“I have friends, sir, firm friends. I have a home; neither will fail me, to humour the caprice of the man whom I have been unhappy enough to make my husband.”

“As you will, madam—you are then resolved?”

“I have not yet said so; I have been talked down—overwhelmed with words——”

“Surely, Clara, after such a conversation you cannot hesitate;” broke in the countess.

“Your ladyship is premature;” was the reply: “there are other preliminaries to ar-

range; Mr. Nichols will be polite enough to remember that I cannot be left—since to leave me is his lordly will!—a beggar.”

Nichols started—the truth flashed upon him; this scene had indeed been anticipated; he cursed the law of separate maintenance; he felt that he had been duped, but he restrained himself, and Lady Clara spoke again.

“There is another little fact also which it may be necessary to recal;”—she paused, and raised her eyes steadily and defyingly to his face—“I have a father, and a brother—they are not obscure individuals to be elbowed aside: they will ask, and they must be answered; they will probably demand why Mr. Joseph Nichols abandons his wife——”

“I will tell them at once, madam;” said Nichols cutting short the taunt: “simply because his wife has so willed it—because she thought it a pity that a praiseworthy and provident arrangement made at her marriage should not be acted upon—because—shall I

complete my reply?" he asked with sudden sternness; but the eye of Lady Clara sank under his excited and indignant glance, and she remained silent. "Now, then, we thoroughly comprehend each other;" he resumed after the pause of a second: "we can consequently speak plainly. I shall not shrink nor quail under any questioning; and I shall rejoice to hear that you, Lady Clara, and those who have been your counsellors, abide the world's scrutiny with equal calmness."

"I beg it to be distinctly understood, that I use no interference whatever in the affair;" observed the countess.

"That explanation your ladyship must condescend to make to the world;" said Nichols drily: "it will not be altogether unnecessary."

Lady Blacksley bit her lip, and would have replied, but she was strangely at a loss for words.

"I shall, of course, mention this conversation to my father;" said Lady Clara in a tone

of less arrogance than that in which she had hitherto spoken: "he must decide for me."

"Nichols bowed: "I leave town on Wednesday week." He remained for an instant standing silently beside his wife, but she made no rejoinder; and, anxious to terminate a conversation which had saddened as well as disgusted him, he shortly afterwards left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

"*Toujours perdrix!*" murmured Frank to himself, as he sprang from his cabriolet, threw the reins to his groom, and entered the hall door of Mrs. Wilkins; "Really anything for a change—that is, anything *pleasant*—would be quite a relief;—I must get married at once, or I shall never be able to stand it:—making love to a woman of seventy is decidedly the modern illustration of the mythological image of drawing water in a sieve—one's best ideas, one's prettiest metaphors fall still-born, even after one is half choked with the enormity of their utterance—and yet"—thus Harcourt continued to soliloquize as he ascended the stairs

more leisurely than usual—"after all, so that the money be forthcoming, and the means of enjoyment with it, the difference between a young wife and an old one, like that in the weight of the live and dead fish with which Charles the Second hoaxed the wiseacres of the Royal Society, is merely ideal! So courage, Frank;—and now for the widow!"

The door of the well-known apartment yielded to his touch, and yet he stood at the threshold an instant ere he entered. The room had but one occupant, and that one was not Mrs. Wilkins. The opening of the door had aroused from a reverie, evidently a distressing one, for the tears yet rested on her cheek, a young and lovely female. She was dressed in the deepest mourning, and a shade of sadness, too decided for her years, clouded her fair white brow.

As her eye met that of Harcourt, it flashed proudly; and she rose from her seat, and hastily brushed away the tears which she felt

were profaned by his unwelcome gaze. The start, the recognition, were mutual : but not so the feeling which succeeded that recognition. The blood had mantled the brow of Harcourt almost as deeply as her own ; but no shame mingled with the surprise which was so visible in his countenance—in an instant he saw and felt that he was remembered—and the heartless libertine almost believed that remembrance to be a triumph, even coupled, as it must be in the mind of the fair young creature before him, with the memory of insult and alarm. Yes, *she* was indeed before him who had haunted his thoughts in despite of all his efforts to forget her—standing timidly and tremblingly, though her proud and disdainful look might have cheated one less world-worn than himself into the belief that she met him without other feelings than those of cold, unmitigated scorn ; but there was a quiver in the lip, and a drooping of the eyelid, as his gaze met hers steadily, almost triumphantly, that

told all her fear, her helplessness, to the practised and calculating eye of Harcourt. Who can she be? and how came she here? were the questions which he mentally asked himself in the brief interval during which they stood face to face in silence. There was a shade of defiance rapidly gathering on either brow: with Agnes it was the timid defiance of insulted feminine purity; with Harcourt it was that of a bold, reckless, impassioned libertine. The injured are usually those who suffer the most deeply in a chance encounter with the individuals who have injured them: it was so here. Harcourt was the first to recover his self-possession, but his position was nevertheless one of sufficient difficulty, for as yet he knew not under what circumstances his beautiful Incognita had been added to the family circle of his betrothed wife—that she *was* added to the family circle was abundantly evident; she was surrounded by the thousand little articles so indispensable to a lady's work-table—her ap-

pearance, her dress, the perfect arrangement of her fine dark hair, all betrayed the fact of her domestication; there was none of the flutter, the partial disarray, the restlessness of recent arrival about her: she was calm, and cold, and collected. Could she be an honored and a cherished guest? She looked too timid, too terror-stricken by the arrival of another who was unwelcome to her: too uncertain, as it seemed, of the extent of her own power of action, to feel herself "the observed of all observers," which from her beauty she must necessarily have been, had not some yoke bowed her young spirit. Could she be a dependant? He almost hated himself for the suspicion, as he looked on the high, proud brow, mantled by the rich blood of indignant recollection—Still she *did* recollect: and on the faith of that worse than equivocal consciousness, he at length spoke.

"Do not suffer me to disturb you, madam: pray resume your seat; I am unused to be

treated as a stranger in this house. And from *you*,"—the emphasis brought the blood in deeper volumes to the cheek of Agnes,—
"from *you* I should doubly deprecate all ceremonious observances."

"I owe you none, sir, ceremonious or otherwise;" faltered Miss Davenel, making a violent effort to subdue at once the easy self-possession of Harcourt; "I rose from my chair, simply because I would not condescend to sit near one, who when he has chanced to occupy my thoughts, has ever done so as an object of disgust and avoidance."

"That is a feeling to which I am so perfectly unaccustomed from your sex, madam;" said Frank in an accent of pique, "that its very novelty will recommend it; but, if my memory serve me, there should be another object, doubtless of disgust and avoidance as well as myself, blended with your reminiscences of my unworthy person. Nay, never blush, madam,—with so unexceptionable an

introduction, you must have felt quite consoled by his protection and support."

Agnes preserved the silence of bitter emotion.

"I have really some right to complain;" pursued Frank, who felt that he had to contend with a very unequal adversary, as he stood with a half-mocking smile, rocking to and fro the chair, on the back of which he was leaning, until his companion should resume her seat. "I do not see why a fair lady should discard a true knight, to smile upon an adventurer—but all that is now gone by; and if, as I suspect and hope, we are to meet frequently beneath this roof, I will promise to forget and forgive, like a well-disposed young gentleman, and we will shake hands, and be friends." And as he terminated this harangue, Harcourt had the audacity to extend his hand to the orphan.

"Never, sir!" exclaimed Agnes, as she looked her heart's scorn on the excited young

man; "never shall my hand be polluted by your touch. It may indeed be desirable for *you* to forget all that once passed between us—it is ever desirable to escape the consciousness of shame—but do not dream, sir, that *I* shall ever forget;—from *your* lips only have I been fated to hear the words of insult, and be assured that I shall remember them till my dying day."

"As you please, madam;" said Frank, as he thought how much more beautiful his Incognita looked under the influence of indignation: "Then we are to be foes, is it not so? to sleep in our harness like knights on a crusade, and be ever ready to do battle;—we are likely, should my conjecture prove correct, to have a very stirring time of it. You are provided with a squire; I have one to seek—but I do not despair; the trottoir, you know, madam, is prolific in such personages. Have you ever related that one little passage in your history to our worthy hostess? If not,

it will make an excellent story for the evening hearth."

Agnes involuntarily started : in an instant the thought of how such a narrative, deepened and broadened by the lips of a man like the one before her, would be received by her stern and cold-hearted protectress, flashed across her mind ; and she felt all the wretched dependence of her present position with tenfold bitterness.

Frank instantly saw his advantage, and remorsefully pursued it : " Do not let any consideration for me induce you to withhold the communication, I entreat ; for our good friend Mrs. Wilkins will fully comprehend the probability of a young man volunteering to make the acquaintance of a pretty woman walking alone in the streets of London—it will be an excellent excuse also for improving our acquaintance, as it will prove to her that we are not entirely strangers to each other—in short, it will do an infinity of good. She will be

delighted with the naïveté of the incident, and love us both the better for our candour. Is it not an excellent idea?"

Agnes did not reply: she could not. She stood silently before him, with the tear of insulted feeling, and the blush of offended modesty struggling for mastery. The position of the intruder in the family of Mrs. Wilkins she could not define, but she fearfully felt that it must be that of one who knew well his own influence, or he had not dared to put on so bold a front, and to insult any individual beneath her roof.

"You are silent, madam;" resumed Frank after a short interval. "Will you entrust the tale to *my* telling? I will do no dishonor to the adventure. I will dilate on the beauty of the fair pedestrian—on the enormity of the idle 'young man about town' who ventured to address her in the words of compliment—and on the prowess of the gallant young hero who threw down his gauntlet in defiance;—the tale

shall not lose in the telling, or my name is not Frank Harcourt."

"If such be indeed the name which you have disgraced," said Agnes, "I trust that it may never more offend my ear. If I shrank beneath the bold intrusive insult, which is my first memory of the individual who wears that name, I doubly scorn the mean, unmanly taunts with which I must now connect it. I leave you, sir; I hope it may be to repent the wrong."

As Agnes spoke, she moved proudly to the door; which Frank, foreseeing her purpose, and resolved to convince her of his perfect consciousness of the importance which she attached to her secret, sprang forward, and opened for her with a profound bow of over-acted deference, and without the interchange of another word between them, she gained the solitude of her chamber.

Miss Davenel had scarcely left the room ere the wayward spirit of Harcourt led him to

accuse himself, not of a want of generosity, but of weakness, in his conduct during the late interview; he blamed himself for a deficiency of tact, when a failure in temper only, was the origin of his error; as he looked on the orphan, the memory of his mortification came bitterly across him, and he yielded to its influence. As soon as she had withdrawn, he remembered his uncertainty with regard to her position in the house of Mrs. Wilkins; and he remembered also, that by his own rash conduct, he was probably depriving himself of all future chance of winning the forgiveness and favor of the loveliest girl upon whom it had ever been his fortune to look. Frank had certainly never shewn less self-possession. It is a curious fact that wounded vanity is the most unmanageable of all feelings; we may suppress contempt—we may conceal dislike—we may veil indifference—we may forgive injury—but touch our vanity, and we recoil from the pressure, as though it probed a wound—mortify it,

and the sting festers for ever. Perhaps Harcourt was even unusually morbid on this point, as only in that one solitary instance had he smarted beneath the feeling; certain it is, that the recollection over-mastered him; but now he could almost have blushed when he remembered the wantonness of his insulting language to the pale and gentle girl who had just quitted him; he felt, he even avowed to himself, that the attack had been unworthy alike of a man and of a gentleman—and then—the policy of the proceeding was so undeniably, so palpably bad! The second consideration was worse than the first: a few gentle words of apology, a flattering and fluttered affectation of self-abasement, a sigh or two, and a promise of amendment for the future, might set *that* to rights—*might!* must—for was she not a woman? “Yes, yes,” murmured Frank complacently:

“ ‘She is a woman, therefore to be wooed;

She is a woman, therefore to be won——’ ”

But his uncompromising, his triumphant levity had perhaps led her at once from his presence to that of Mrs. Wilkins; nay, even now while he was lying stretched along the sofa, speculating on the probable effects of his late intemperate folly, those effects might be already in operation!—the thought was not to be borne. In five minutes he had persuaded himself that it must be so, or why was not the widow even now beside him? Her absence was unusual: she had hitherto always anticipated his arrival! “Better to know the worst at once,”—ejaculated Frank as he sprang from the sofa, and pulled the bell with an energy which threatened to alarm the whole household.

“The worst of what?” asked a well-known voice close to him, and he turned to meet the extended hand of Mrs. Wilkins. A servant obeyed the noisy summons, and was dismissed, which gave Frank time to collect himself for a reply.

“Nay, my dear Mrs. Wilkins:” he said in

that tone of deprecating tenderness which he knew so well how to assume when it was likely to serve him with the sex: "what think you, save thoughts of yourself, could so deeply move me?—I have had a dream—a vision of idle import, but it is over now: you are beside me—well, charming, with a bright smile and a kind tone; and the clouds of fancy are dispersed by your presence as by a fairy wand. But you have played truant sadly to-day, I have been—let me see—yes, at least ten minutes in the house."

"And alone?" asked the lady suddenly.

"Not all the time;—there was a—" Frank glanced at the darkening brow of the widow, and comprehended his position in an instant; "a young person in the room when I arrived; hemming a shred of muslin, I believe; but she disappeared, and left me to my reflections."

"Very proper;" said Mrs. Wilkins, "I am glad she knows so well how to conduct her-

self. I am really sorry, my dear Harcourt, to have to request your forbearance for this additional encumbrance; but the girl is distantly related to me, and having been left destitute, I thought I could not in common decency let her starve; and accordingly I have promised to take care of her."

"Entirely destitute, did you say?" asked Harcourt, with a peculiar feeling which he could not have explained even to himself.

"Perfectly so: and under these circumstances I thought, if I could in any way make her useful in the house, she would be less expence here than elsewhere."

"Admirably judged!" said Frank with a suppressed smile, "and now perhaps you will permit me to suggest an arrangement; I think I understood you to say, my dear Mrs. Wilkins, that Miss Parsons wished to visit her family—poor thing!—such a wish is very natural and praiseworthy; and it appears to me

that this would be an excellent opportunity of indulging her, while this—what is the young person's name?"

"Agnes Davenel," said the widow.

"While this Miss Agnes Davenel supplies her place. Need I hint that curious eyes are by no means desirable to either of us in our present position, my dear Mrs. Wilkins?" and as he spoke, Frank raised the hand of the lady to his lips, and she mistook the smile of self-gratulation at his secret hopes, for one of tenderness towards herself: "If this Miss Davenel must become your inmate, we can fairly dispense with Miss Parsons:—how say you, my dear madam, do you approve of my suggestion?"

"Can I do otherwise?" replied the widow: "when I know that a delicate consideration for my feelings has induced you to make it? It is an excellent thought. Miss Parsons shall go—*that* is decided, and Agnes Davenel shall supply her place as far as she is capable of

doing so: but I do not think she will ever be half so useful. She is willing to do anything, but a sharp word drowns her in tears, and the very name of her parents sends her to her chamber weeping like a school girl. Absurd, to bring up a girl who is absolutely a beggar, with such silly ideas! She could not have finer feelings, nor more sentimental whims, if she had ten thousand a-year. She must learn to get over all this; but she was brought up by a silly old grandmother, as melancholy and as proud as herself, and it will take time to cure her of all her fancies. I can only determine never to attend to any of her complaints, but to let her get on as well as she can: and having in that way done my duty by her, I must trust to chance for the rest."

"A very wise resolution;" said Frank with affected sententiousness: "girls have so many whims that it is quite impossible to attend to them. For my own part, I shall never pay the least attention to the fancies of any poor rela-

tion; and if you, my dear friend, consult your own happiness and peace of mind, you will never listen to any folly of a diseased and morbid imagination."

Harcourt spoke earnestly, for he *was* in earnest—yet he was not rightly understood: nor did he intend to be so—his fancy was running riot: he had the hand of his betrothed bride in his, and he was dreaming wild and worthless dreams, and drawing from her confiding though foolish affection, his most tangible hopes of their realization.

"I have just left her in her room;" pursued the unsuspecting widow: "she is weeping, silently it is true, but as bitterly as though she had not a good home—I cannot help thinking that there is a lover in the case." Frank started, and became all attention—"A young man brought her here."

"Some adventurer;" said Harcourt with a bitter sneer.

"Very possibly:" was the reply. "But be he whom he may, I have forbidden him the house; I detest every thing of the sort; I will not lend myself to the degradation of some pauper marriage, and be cheated out of my reason by tales of love, and affection, and so forth."

Frank felt as though he could have choked.

"But we have talked enough of this strange girl;" said Mrs. Wilkins after a pause: "I'm sure I wish she had died in her cradle with her foolish mother; fine ladies without sixpence are an intolerable nuisance—but you will bear with her for my sake, my dear Harcourt, will you not? I will take care that to you she shall conduct herself with the respect and deference which is your due, or she shall not long enjoy a home in my house."

"Do not distress me by such an appeal, my best friend; for your dear sake, Agnes Davenel shall be an object of my especial interest:"

said Frank gently. "Fear not, we shall soon shew her the fallacy of such idle tears: she is but a child, you know, and we must treat her as such.—As you justly say, we have talked enough of this strange girl,—and now we will think only of ourselves. When, my adored friend, when am I to hope that this dear hand"——

"There's a frightful smell of burning in the house, ma'am," said Miss Parsons, bursting into the room, and spoiling one of Frank's best attitudes: "but I've come to beg you will not be alarmed, as there's nothing the matter—it's only"—

"Really, Miss Parsons, you are unbearable!" almost screamed Mrs. Wilkins, as she snatched her hand from the grasp of Harcourt; "you have terrified me to death—I am absolutely sick—faint;—send Willis with my sal-volatile—do not bring it yourself—do not let me see you again till I send for you.—

And now, my dear Frank;" she asked in a gentler tone, as the door closed behind the frightened companion,—“ what is it that you were going to ask?”

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CHAPTER IX.

AGNES DAVENEL did indeed, as Mrs. Wilkins had informed Harcourt, weep silent and heart-wrung tears when she reached her own chamber. She looked around her: every thing was strange; there was no resting-place for affection. She thought of the past: on one sunny spot only could her memory rest; all, save that one, was a dreary blank; she reflected on the present, and she shrank shudderingly from the reality which it presented; a roof grudgingly and murmuringly granted, which could never be a home; a protectress cold and repelling, who could never be a friend; the only one who loved her, forbidden to

soothe her sorrows; the only one she feared, lording it in her very presence, and, as it were, daring her to resent the insult. At length a smile wreathed her young lip: her thoughts had wandered into the future—far, far away from the misery of the past, and the bitterness of the present; they were with Eustace in a humble, but a happy home: she fancied the long bright morning, spent in quiet and contented usefulness; the calm twilight, the hour of social converse, passed in words of tenderness and affection; and dearer still, the well-ordered and cheerful hearth, gay with its dancing light and its million associations; how beautiful, how bland was the anticipation of such a home! But the sand-pile of imagination soon crumbled away; and again she was seated in her solitary chamber in the house of her cold relative, beneath the same roof with the man whom she dreaded. Again the large, sad tears fell heavily on her cheek; and had it

not been that Eustace felt a pride in her beauty, she could have prayed in the bitterness of her spirit, that it might pass away from her, even now, in her bright youth.

“And how shall I write to him?” she mused: “what can I say to shed over his heart that peace which is now a stranger to my own? I dare not tell him that the bold bad man, whom he, even gentle and loving as he is, hates so bitterly, I dare not tell him that he is *here*—that we have met; that again he has uttered words of insolence and scorn to me, a betrothed wife; that he may be, for aught I know, an inmate of the house—now, now indeed,” she continued, passionately wringing her hands, “do I feel my utter helplessness, my miserable dependence!”

Agnes sat for awhile in an agony of grief, but after a time she rose; resolutely wiped away the fast-coming tears, and knelt down in silent prayer. Long she continued pouring out her wounded spirit before the Being who

hath power to heal the breaking heart, and to raise up the drooping head. It was a beautiful sight to see that young and gentle girl seeking peace where alone it is to be found; thus casting her cares at the footstool of her God, and forgetting the creature in the Creator. When her prayer was ended, she looked up, and she was no longer in tears; and ere long she sat down to write the promised letter to Eustace.

“Did I tell you that I am happy”—thus she wrote: “it were to wrong alike your affection and my own; happiness and Eustace are now so blent in my heart, that they must exist together: I am contented; if that be indeed content which, amid a stagnation of the spirit, teaches us to look calmly on our actual position; I am grateful, for have I not great cause to be so? the thought of you, Eustace, the memory of your generous affection, would alone ensure my gratitude; but I have still greater cause for thankfulness: I look around

me on the houseless mendicants who wander beneath my window, and I remember that, like them, I might not have had a resting-place, but for His mercy who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; and though I may sometimes weep in my solitude, still I am grateful. Eustace! have you forgotten how often we looked together on the glorious sky of evening? how we watched the deepening shadows of night stealing, like a sable veil, over the face of nature? how we loved the soft, sweet, silver moon when she rose like some peaceful spirit, calmly and silently to her cloudless throne? and how we fancied a thousand bright fables as we gazed upon the glittering stars? I love that hour still, Eustace, beyond all others: for then my heart is full of you, and of your affection; and when I sink to sleep, you are in my dreams; I look upon you, I listen to you—your low voice is in my ear, and in the depths of my spirit, and I *am* happy *then*! And what

though I awaken to feel that all is but a dream, will not the time come when I shall no longer fear to awake? when my night-visions will but reflect the blessedness of the day which has preceded them? It will—it must. We are forbidden to look upon each other. Merciful was the boon of thought! *that* at least is free; and shall we not see each other mentally throughout every hour of the long weary day? Yes, Eustace; of this happiness, at least, they cannot deprive your—AGNES.”

When she had closed her letter, the orphan sat for a time with her cheek resting on her hand; had she dared to pour out the tenderness of her whole heart, what gentle things might she not have said to Eustace; had she dwelt upon her affection, had she told him all her love, how differently would that letter have been worded; but Agnes felt that, even dear as he was, she could not do this! It was the first time that she had ventured to

trust the expression of her attachment to aught beyond a whisper; and now her woman-cheek crimsoned, and her woman-heart beat quicker as she looked upon the paper whereon she had inscribed her first acknowledgment of passion.

She was still in the same attitude, when a gentle knock at the door of her apartment startled her from her reverie: with a heightened colour, and a trembling hand, she secured the letter which was lying before her, and then bade her visitor enter; the door opened, and the meaningless countenance of Miss Parsons presented itself.

"Pray come in;" said Agnes, as she rose from her seat, and placed a chair for her unexpected guest: "you are very kind thus to visit me in my own apartment, more particularly as I am but sad society at present."

Poor Miss Parsons had not been told that she was very kind for the last seventeen years, and as she seated herself, she looked up with

quiet surprise at the fair girl who had just uttered the assurance: "I thought you were not well, and might require something;" she said calmly, "you looked but poorly when you came down this morning: and as you do not yet know the ways of the house, I just came to tell you that you must ask for what you want, without waiting for Mrs. Wilkins to offer it to you—she never orders anything except for herself and Mr. Harcourt."

Agnes had never felt the want of sympathy and kindness more than she did at this moment, and she looked her gratitude for the kindly forethought of the simple-minded companion; but when she mentioned the name of the young barrister, the orphan started, and listened anxiously: Miss Parsons however continued silent, having said all which she came to say, and being accustomed to confine her conversational efforts within the narrow limits of simple expediency. In fact, had Miss Parsons been by nature a model of garrulity when

she entered the establishment of Mrs. Wilkins, she could not have continued such after the first six weeks: the widow's dialogues with her dependant consisted of assertion and dictation on the one side, and monosyllabic assent on the other: of course the associates of Mrs. Wilkins were cautious not to honor by any portion of their notice, a person on whom she herself bestowed so little of her own; and thus Miss Parsons had degenerated by degrees into a species of human dormouse, sleeping away one half of her time, and eating and drinking during the remainder.

A few seconds elapsed ere Agnes could command sufficient courage to ask in a low voice—
“ Pray, madam, who is Mr. Harcourt?”

Miss Parsons edged her chair still closer to that of her companion; gave a sort of convulsive clutch at her well-worn wig, which destroyed the propriety of its position; and after taking a long look round the apartment, as though she feared that every piece of furni-

ture which it contained possessed an ear to hear, and a tongue to report her communication, whispered out, "I really don't know, Miss Davenel; I wish I did."

Agnes could have smiled at all the preliminary caution of the old lady when she considered in what it had terminated, had she not shuddered to reflect on the state of moral and miserable abasement which it betrayed; she sighed deeply, and continued silent.

After the pause of a few moments Miss Parsons began to fidget on her chair: there was something in the fair young creature beside her, which won even upon her blunted and deadened feelings. Just at this time also her mind was unusually burthened by anxiety and doubt. She longed to communicate to some one her fears and her suspicions: hitherto she had not met with any person who would listen to her, or in whom she dared confide; but Agnes looked so gentle, and smiled so sweetly, that she felt sure that

even if she could not assist, she would not betray her.

Strange power of purity! Agnes sat patiently and kindly waiting until Miss Parsons should either speak again, or take her leave, wholly unsuspecting of the feelings of trust and confidence which were gradually deepening in the bosom of that single-hearted woman towards herself; at length timidly she gave utterance to her anxiety.

“Who is he indeed, Miss Davenel? I do not know—Mrs. Wilkins does not know—no one knows;—who he wishes to be, and who he will be before long is another thing, and one that every body knows.” Miss Parsons drew a long breath, and turned a frightened glance on Agnes, as though she almost repented her want of caution.

“Who he will be?” echoed Agnes involuntarily.

“Yes, yes; who he will too surely be, soon;” pursued the poor old lady, reassured

by the sound of her companion's low, sweet voice. "I have watched, and I have seen, Miss Davenel; I have listened, and I have heard—I see you blame me;" she continued, as she remarked the blush which mantled the brow of the orphan, and her instinctive recoil; "I knew that it was wrong; but remember that I looked and listened for my bread; that I watched to learn if I were to be a beggar; it is hard to be cast on the world in our old age, Miss Davenel, when health and strength are wasted;—it is hard, very hard!" Miss Parsons paused, trembling at her own unusual vehemence; but the orphan, rebuked by her words and tone, hung her head meekly, as though in sorrow that she had thrust the barbed arrow yet deeper into the wound.

"When I was young;" pursued Miss Parsons; "I felt as though I could have struggled against a world of suffering—I don't know how it is, but now I have only strength of purpose left to bend my neck to the yoke—even if

I had the means of subsistence, how could I exist? I have no will; I am too old to strive for one—I have no hope; I have outlived all that—what is to become of me?”

Tears were in the eyes of Agnes: “I do not understand you;” she said gently; “surely you have no intention of quitting your present home?”

“It will be no home for me;” replied Miss Parsons sadly, as she shook her head in all the hopelessness of conviction; “it will be no home for me when Mrs. Wilkins becomes the wife of Mr. Harcourt.”

“The wife of Mr. Harcourt!” exclaimed Agnes in undisguised astonishment: “impossible! really, my dear madam, you are terrifying yourself with shadowy fancies.”

“Is it a shadowy fancy to see him kiss her hand, and to hear him talk to her of love and marriage, and a future life of devotion to her alone? Is it fancy when I am sent from the

room, sometimes from the house, lest I should break in upon their privacy?"

The indignant blood mounted to the brow of Agnes: "Mean, pitiful wretch!" she exclaimed; "worse than even I had thought him!"

Miss Parsons was too much absorbed in her own griefs to remark the unguarded apostrophe of her companion; and after a moment's hesitation, she resumed: "Take care of yourself, Miss Davenel; you are young and beautiful; and although Mr. Harcourt may persuade a woman of twice his years, with his smooth tongue and his ready smile, to believe that he loves her, he cannot hoodwink others. I have no faith in his flippant professions, in his voluble assertions; and you have no smooth path before you, my dear young lady."

Agnes replied by a sigh so deep that it startled her companion.

"Nay, nay, do not take my words so much to heart;" quickly remonstrated the good-na-

tured Miss Parsons, who had neither tact nor talent ever to look beyond the surface: "I would only warn you: he may not be so very bad after all; but it's a sore temptation for a light-headed young man like Mr. Harcourt; he *must* make comparisons in his own mind—he must see the difference between your beauty and Mrs. Wilkins's wrinkles. You have but one course to pursue."

"Oh! point it out, I implore of you!" exclaimed Agnes: "be the path ever so thorny, fear me not, I will tread it unshrinkingly."

Miss Parsons mused for a moment, as she contemplated an energy which she could not comprehend; but she was so unaccustomed to have her opinion listened to, far less sought for, that she yielded to her innocently-gratified vanity, and continued with a smile of as much sagacity as she could call up. "Simply then, my dear Miss Davenel, I should counsel you never to be alone with Mr. Harcourt when you can avoid it."

"I will shrink from him as I would from the breath of the plague-wind;" interposed Agnes.

"Never appear pleased with his attention—Mrs. Wilkins has the eye of an eagle;—and always, my dear young lady, in pity to her vanity, sit with your back to the light."

Agnes, had her heart been light as it once was, could have smiled at this simple and guileless code of feminine tactics, delivered in a tone as oracular as that of the Delphic priestess; but she only sighed to find how little the well-meant but shallow counsel of her new friend could avail her.

As Miss Parsons rose to depart, a sudden sense of the extent to which she stood committed by all the information and inferences which she had volunteered to a comparative stranger, should that stranger betray her, appeared to fasten on her mind; and she paused for an instant overwhelmed by the conviction: her breath came quick, and her lip trembled

with emotion; but when at length she again raised her eyes to the face of Agnes, she became re-assured; and as she seized the hand which was extended to her, she murmured: "No, no; I do not fear you—you will not betray me to my ruin—you are too good, too gentle, to beggar my grey hairs."

"I would die first!" said Agnes ardently; and the single-minded Miss Parsons felt as she listened, that she was safe.

CHAPTER X.

NEVER was a less happy-looking, nor less social party collected in the library of the Earl of Somerville than the one to which we are about to introduce our readers. The apartment was the very embodiment of comfort; the heavy crimson curtains were closely drawn; the fire blazed cheerfully in the polished grate; and the huge log which surmounted it, threw out at intervals a shower of golden sparks, as the encroaching flames made fiercer and bolder inroads towards its centre. The walls were lined with books in costly bindings, each in its place, as though ranged there less for use than ornament; the rich Turkey carpet buried the

feet like many-coloured moss, and the writing-apparatus which glittered gaily among uncut pamphlets, unopened letters, and unfolded newspapers, was massive and magnificent. On one side of the fire sat Lady Clara Nichols, with the countess her aunt for her vis-à-vis; stretched along a sofa lay Lord Ashburnham, sharing his resting-place with a favorite pointer; while the earl himself was pacing slowly and silently to and fro the apartment.

“It can signify little at all events;” said Lady Clara somewhat sullenly resuming a conversation which had evidently been of no pleasurable description: “we have all looked forward to the event as a very probable one from the first; and it can signify little whether it occurs now, or a few months hence.”

“You are in error, Lady Clara Nichols;” said the earl sententiously, as he paused in his progress across the floor; “it will signify very considerably: time might have stayed the tongues of the world—time might have si-

lenced the gossiping of your own clique—time might have enabled me to pay off Ashburnham's debts"——

"And enabled Ashburnham to contract new ones;" observed Lady Clara, still more sullenly.

"Don't make me a party in the business, I beg;" said the young man, as he pinched the ear of Rover until he howled; "I hate all these affairs, as I do bad claret, or a long bill."

"It has been a foolish business altogether—that is my private opinion;" observed the countess! "and the sooner Clara frees herself of the connection the better, *I* think."

"Vastly well! and very heroic;" resumed the earl contemptuously: "but probably you are not aware, madam, that your niece is very likely to free herself of the money as well as of the man; that if she really determine on this mad exploit, she will shake off the gold dust as well as the city dust from her feet.—

Ha! you look amazed; but Mr. Nichols was not the tool which in your wisdom you imagined him to be; or you were not sufficiently crafty in your trade to understand how to make him available—I have guessed from the commencement how the affair was likely to terminate; I told you on a former, a very remote occasion, that you were bad tacticians.”

“I remember it, my lord;” said the countess somewhat ruffled; “but I consider both your daughter and myself to be undeserving of the taunt—no aunt ever struggled more arduously for the establishment of a niece than I did for that of Lady Clara; nor do I think that any unmarried female of family and title ever exerted herself more strenuously to second the views of her relatives than she has done.”

“Did I not sacrifice myself for my family?” demanded Lady Clara in the tone of a martyr.

“Your family are deeply indebted to you;”

said the earl with a bend of affected deference; “ may I ask how they have benefitted by your self-immolation?—My landed property is heavily mortgaged—Ashburnham’s credit will not hold out six months longer—I have not a stick of timber worth cutting on any of my estates—and I positively cannot stand another season in town. You are the wife of a man worth forty thousand a year—a man who might have been managed, had you known how to play your cards. The little benefit which your family, for whom you so generously sacrificed yourself, have derived from this ill-omened marriage, has been of their own procuring. If *I* found Mr. Nichols manageable, *you* surely ought to have done so.”

“I shall be satisfied with the house in town, and three thousand a-year;” said Lady Clara quietly: “ he may do as he pleases with the remainder—build hospitals, or alms-houses, if such be his fancy, and luxuriate in the view

of his patrician name graven on the centre stone above the door of entrance. I shall not interfere with any of his pursuits, and I only require the same forbearance on his part with regard to mine."

The earl laughed; it was a bitter mocking laugh that thrilled to the heart of Lady Clara. "I should think you will find some difficulty in convincing Mr. Nichols of the expediency of such an arrangement."

"In that case," said the little countess fidgeting on her seat, and glancing compassionately at her niece,—“in that case, my lord, Clara might as well have married for love.”

“And did she not?” asked Lord Somerville ironically: “I am sure, from part of a conversation which I accidentally overheard between Mr. Nichols and herself previous to their marriage, I thought that there could not be a doubt of her having done so.”

“This is really worse than idle!” interposed Lady Clara indignantly; “unworthy of

you, my lord, and insulting to me. If I am to be thus requited for my obedience, I might as well have gratified my own fancy, and married Mr. Harcourt, whom I gave up to oblige you."

"It would have been better if you had, perhaps:" said the earl drily, as he looked steadily towards her.

Lady Clara coloured over brow and bosom; and she leant forward in her chair, as if preparing to reply, but she nevertheless continued silent.

"We will change the subject for one which may prove more agreeable:" resumed the earl still more coldly: "we have in starting the present topic certainly plunged our hands among the nettles."

Still there was silence.

"So many persons think Clara to blame not to separate from her husband at once;" said the countess with ready tact: "I do believe

that fifty friends have begged me to remonstrate with her on the subject."

"You are fortunate in being able to boast of fifty friends, Lady Blacksley;" replied the earl, "even though they may be very misjudging ones: but I doubt extremely if any one of them would be kind enough to remove the obloquy of such a step from the shoulders of your niece to their own, even though it may have been of their own counselling. The simple question now is, whether Lady Clara Nichols, to gratify a feeling of childish wilfulness, really intends to suffer her husband to leave town with such a resolution as the one which he has expressed?"

"Most undoubtedly I do:" was the reply. "I can see no possible advantage to myself in countenancing such a spirit of obstinate domination on the part of a man who is totally indifferent to me:—the whole affair may be summed up in a few words,—if he *will* go, he

must go—if I will *not* go, I *shall* not go—we are both free agents.”

“Then the business is settled;” remarked the countess quietly.

“I am glad of it;” yawned Lord Ashburnham: “these family discussions always disturb my digestion: if a man really wishes to enjoy existence, he should always allow himself to stagnate after dinner.”

“I am afraid, Frederick;” said the earl; “that you will stagnate altogether if you do not look about you. I wish you could win some heiress whose money might free you from your embarrassments.”

“What! with Clara’s marriage before my eyes as a warning, my lord? No, no; ‘forewarned, forearmed,’ says the proverb; it must be all love now; rosy-lipped, laughing love, to ensnare me after my experience of wedded life in my own family.”

“Ashburnham is right;” said the countess

in a tone of sentiment: "affection is after all the best foundation for happiness."

"We always value that which we have never known;" followed up the earl in an accent of biting sarcasm: "we make sunny valleys and diamond mines in every mental Utopia.—But if indeed this foolish resolve of Clara's be irrevocable, we must begin to look on it calmly and dispassionately,—in short we must make the best of it—but my decided advice is, that she leave town with her husband, and at least endeavour to keep up appearances for a few months longer. She does not see enough of Nichols to render the infliction very unbearable."

"My mind is made up:" said the lady calmly.

"Very well—then it only remains for him to make up his: it may be as uncompromising as your own."

"He cannot hesitate to allow Lady Clara

three thousand a-year out of forty;" said the countess: "if he should, he will degenerate into a Jew. Remember he has enjoyed the *éclat* of his marriage."

The earl laughed again: it was a very disagreeable species of laughter; it said all those bitter things which his high breeding would not allow him to express by words. There was a sort of free-masonry in it; you felt at once what his opinion was as to the sagacity and point of that by which it had been elicited.

"I really see nothing so very ridiculous in my remark, my lord;" said the countess pettishly: "Mr. Nichols married from a feeling of idle ambition, and he has gratified the fancy."

"What a development of matrimonial motives!" said the earl with a smile: "however we will let it pass.—Nichols will be here shortly, and we must do the best we can with him. Ashburnham, you may as well not be present; he may rake up a few disagreeable reminis-

cences of past accommodation, if you remain here to remind him of them."

" Well then," said the young lord as he gathered himself up, and rose from the sofa, " I will to my club.—Adieu, Clary ; a free will, and a good income to you, carissima mia!" and with these words he disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

“ You understand me, Miss Davenel ;” said Mrs. Wilkins coldly, as she sat opposite to the orphan, and fixed her eyes almost sternly upon her excited countenance : “ I must have no coquettish whims, no flirting fancies to attract the attention of Mr. Harcourt. There are reasons which render all such attentions on his part to you, or to any other young person, highly indecorous.”

“ There are indeed, madam,” replied Agnes with a deep sigh. Mrs. Wilkins looked at her in astonishment : could she be conscious of the precise nature of those reasons ? it almost appeared as though she was ; and the good

lady fidgetted on her chair, and felt vastly uncomfortable that her secret was betrayed, and extremely curious as to how it had been so; but Agnes made no farther remark, and there was a calm collectedness about her that arrested the questioning which rose to the lips of Mrs. Wilkins.

“ Mr. Harcourt is a frequent visitor here:” she pursued after a short pause, “ he is a person for whom I have a high regard; but as he comes into this house in the character of my friend, it will be as well for you to see as little of him as may be consistent with good breeding. He is a young man of high connections, and moves in the first circles; he may be pardoned therefore if he is somewhat fastidious on the subject of his associates; you are aware, Miss Davenel, that as a dependant of mine—as a poor relation in short, you can never hope for the friendship of Mr. Harcourt, though you may contribute to his

amusement;—if you have any pride therefore you will avoid this.”

“ As I would a pestilence, madam;” said Agnes in a tone of haughty disdain which betrayed not the bitter sense of her humiliating position, so ruthlessly forced upon her by the words of her companion; “ if Mr. Harcourt indeed seek to pass an idle hour with any individual under this roof, that individual shall not be Agnes Davenel. Amid all my poverty, madam, amid all my affliction, I have never yet bent my spirit so far earthward as to suffer myself to become the plaything of a libertine——”

“ Of a what ?” exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins with distended eye-balls: “ a libertine, did you say, Miss Davenel? Have a care, young lady, I am not easily roused to anger; but I warn you that another disrespectful word on the subject of my exemplary friend Mr. Harcourt, and you will cease to be sheltered by my roof!”

“And must not that man be a libertine, madam;” asked the orphan proudly, as she swept back the dark hair from her brow, and looked calmly at her excited companion: “a hollow-hearted libertine, against whom you, in your prudence, consider it necessary to warn one so helpless, so unprotected as myself; and that too] under your own roof.— Surely, madam, I may be pardoned the use of such a term, even though I apply it to one whom you honor by the name of friend.”

“I never allow any one in my house to hold such arguments, or to deliver such opinions, Miss Davenel, one mistress is enough in a family; and you are not likely to controul me, as you probably did the callous and crazy old woman who died and left you a beggar. You come of a bad stock, young lady; of a rebellious generation: remember your father and mother, they talked as you do; yes, yes; they had their inclinations, and their resolutions, and they made something of them:—your

mother—keep your seat ; we had better understand each other at once, and I am not accustomed to see people leave the room while I am speaking ; your mother was a proud beauty without sixpence ; and as you have doubtless been told that you have a pretty face, you are anxious to tread in her steps ; you had better look to your footing, for I believe she found it but a slippery path at last. Your father was a ‘ gentleman, and a man of honor ;’ I believe those were the words used in the letter of Mrs. Sydenham when she wrote to ask of me that mercy for you, which she denied to her own child ; and I am bound to believe that he was, for he was a connection of my own ; but your penniless beauty will do very little for you ; and you have no pretension to fasten such names upon my friends. While we are on the subject I talk to you seriously, and remember that it is for the last time.”

Mrs. Wilkins might now have talked for ever ; for the spirit of the orphan was crushed,—

she had been taunted with her poverty—that she could have borne, for the sarcasm extended not beyond herself; but she had heard the memory of her last relative branded with indignity—for the first time she had listened to words of contempt and bitterness reflecting on her parents: those beloved and lamented parents, whose memory was to her as a holy thing never to be rudely touched! She would have flown from the withering sound, but she had been compelled to sit and listen—and now, she cared not what more might follow—she could bear all.

“ I insist, Miss Davenel;” thus was the theme pursued; “ that you treat Mr. Harcourt on all occasions with attention and respect. I do not mean giggling attentions for which he would despise you; but that quiet compliance with all his wishes, that ready obedience to all his commands, which you would yield to mine: but do not let me discover that you go

beyond this;—you are fairly warned, and I never speak twice to caution.”

Surely my heart must break! murmured Agnes to herself, as she entered her small and solitary chamber, and flung herself on her knees. Surely, surely this cannot last!—oh! Eustace, could you have heard her;—could you see me now! But you are spared at least this pang; you have not seen your Agnes humbled to the dust, and trampled on by the insolence of wealth!

Now, at this bitter moment, Agnes remembered that fine passage of mythology which describes the two brothers Cleobis and Biton waiting at the portal of the temple of Juno, after having dutifully drawn the chariot of their mother to that sacred spot, while that grateful and happy mother besought of the goddess that she would reward them for their filial love with the best gift which mortals could receive. Agnes remembered then, in

her affliction, that the prayer was granted, and that a deep sleep fell upon the brothers from which they awoke no more! What would not Agnes have given to have bent down her young head, and laid it at rest for ever!

It is well for us, weak, short-sighted mortals as we are, that our hasty and ill-digested prayers are not granted on the instant; that the petitions of our selfishness are not registered; for we are too prone to overlook the misery which we should inflict on others, by the operation of those vain desires; and to forget the anguish which we should bequeathe to those who cherish us, by our own dastardly escape from suffering.

What is that cowardly wish to die when we are bowed by sorrow, or tortured by accumulated miseries, but mental suicide? and what is suicide, that last, worst, deadliest of transgressions, that crowning sin of mortality, but moral cowardice? No man who moves upon

the surface of this glorious earth, no being upon whom the Creator has impressed his divine image, *can* be so utter an outcast from his kind, as to be *quite alone* :—the world may have gone hardly with him—friends may have fallen from him—associates may have deceived him—he may have been cheated of his birth-right—have been trampled under the chariot-wheels of the great—have wandered in rags, and sunk to the earth with the heart-sickness of hunger, or the maddening pang of thirst, while others have rioted on his inheritance ;—and yet even thus—beggared, debased, and hopeless—even thus he would be less than human did not *one* fond heart cling to him alike through all—some one fond friend, or fonder wife, or tender child, or aged and palsied parent—some one strong link to bind him to his kind, and to turn him to his God ! And while *that one* remains, what is the suicide ? He escapes himself, but he augments the misery of another a hundred-fold—he flies from

the fell tiger Despair, but he casts into the jungle the last, best friend which misery had left to him, to appease the craving of the monster!

If sorrow come to the strong man in the citadel of his home; if the arms of his wife and the smiles of his children cannot beat back the enemy; if his household gods are overthrown around him; should he not possess moral courage to collect the fragments, and to endeavour to raise for these a lowlier altar and a more humble abiding-place; but casting from him at once all energy and religion, hide his head in his mantle, and rush unbidden into the presence of his Maker with his own blood upon his hands—what is the suicide? Ask his bereaved and horror-stricken wife—ask his helpless and dishonored children—and then look into your own heart, and be answered!

Agnes rose from her knees in a chastened spirit: the name of Eustace had mingled with

her prayer; and that name was ever to her as a chastening spell. She felt that she had yet much suffering in store, but Hope was at her heart; she prayed for patience, meekly and humbly prayed; and peace fell upon her sinking soul, as the manna was showered upon those who were fainting in the Wilderness. The same Holy Hand bestowed both the one and the other!

CHAPTER XII.

“ No ; not a step farther, Mr. Harcourt ;” said Lady Clara with affected alarm ; “ not a step farther, though you were as bright as Apollo, and as learned as Eratosthenes.”

Frank paused with the box-door in his hand.

“ Fly”—continued the lady with the same pretty frown—“ to the Antipodes—any where—as though you were mounted on the arrow of Abaris.”

“ Your ladyship is mystical and mythological to-night ;” smiled Harcourt, as he advanced and took a seat beside her ; “ nevertheless, I came here to chat with you, to listen to Pasta, and to look at Taglioni, and I cannot

afford to be disappointed—and now, tell me, why am I under ban?”

“Pshaw! nonsense!” said Lady Blacksley, as she took his extended hand; “only another whim of the earl’s.—Nichols is jealous it seems.”

“A modern Othello!” smiled Frank with a civil sneer: “why will the Moor marry a Desdemona, and then doubt his own worthiness;—it is somewhat early to play the husband.”

“Fie, fie; high treason against my wedded lord;” interposed Lady Clara; “but seriously, Mr. Frank Harcourt is the last person whom I wished to see enter my box to-night.”

“Flattering!” ejaculated the young barrister, as he made the tour of the circle with his lorgnette; “and wherefore?”

“Because you are to Monsieur the very model of *le garçon volage*—because, in short—there, be satisfied: I cannot explain why.”

“The inference is palpable:” replied the unblushing Frank: “Mr. Nichols then, worthy

man! is jealous of *me*!—I am certainly more obliged by his good opinion than by that of your ladyship."

"You are ungenerous, Harcourt:" said the lady coldly; "I have but the consciousness of my own propriety of conduct to console me under the degradation of Mr. Nichols' low-bred suspicions."

Frank pressed to his lips the fan with which he was ostensibly occupied, to conceal the smile which had instinctively wreathed them.

"Why is the dragon not here in person to guard the golden fruit of his Hesperides?"

"He is engaged with the earl;" said Lady Blacksley.

"It is the curse of wealth to 'separate too oft most loving hearts;'" laughed Frank.

The countess smiled, and Lady Clara tossed her little head in scorn.

"I heard to-day at my club," said Harcourt in a low voice, "that Nichols was about to

leave town—and to leave it en garçon—am I to hope that it is so?”

“ I know not why you should put the question in so extraordinary a shape;” was the cold reply; “ nevertheless it does not alter the fact. Mr. Nichols talks of going into Shropshire—I have no desire to be expatriated, and shall consequently remain in town.”

“ Wisely resolved!” exclaimed Frank, as he threw himself into a more becoming attitude; “ s’enterrer vif is by no means desirable.”

“ Apropos;” said Lady Clara, anxious to turn the conversation from her own position; “ how speeds your wooing?”

The blood rushed to the brow of Frank; he laughed uneasily, and was not exactly prepared with a reply. Lady Clara pursued her advantage: “ Why, one would imagine by the flushed face, and unusual silence of Mr. Harcourt, that the fair lady had been cruel! ‘ Can such things be?’ Fancy this box a confessional, and make a ‘ clean breast’ of all your

miseries, that we may know how to commence the duty of consolation."

"My misery," said Frank, "has a very opposite source—my Dulcinea, I fear, does not 'love wisely, but too well'—and I equally fear that I am an ingrate."

"Coxcomb!" laughed Lady Clara. Harcourt shrugged his shoulders, and looked ludicrously miserable.

The box-door opened, and the earl and his son-in-law entered; Mr. Nichols glanced from Harcourt to Lord Somerville, and from his lordship to Lady Clara, whose very lips became pale as she discovered the identity of her visitors.

"Has your ladyship any commands into Shropshire?" asked the husband composedly, as he stood beside her leaning upon the back of the chair from which Frank had risen on his entrance: "I leave town to-morrow morning."

"So soon!" said Lady Clara, startled out

of her habitual self-possession by the collectedness of his manner; "I thought——"

She paused; and Nichols, after having waited a few seconds for the termination of the sentence, resumed in a tone somewhat less steady: "I am glad to find that Lady Clara Nichols has indeed bestowed a thought upon the subject; I scarcely flattered myself that such was the case."

"Disagreeable reflections will recur without our own volition:" said the lady.

"And is the fact of my leaving town really disagreeable to you?" earnestly asked the husband in a low tone, as he approached a step nearer to her chair. It were difficult to guess how the question might have been answered, had not lady Clara at that instant looked up, and met the eyes of Harcourt: there was an expression of scornful amazement in them which she could not brook, and she rallied in an instant.

"By no means; my allusion was less defi-

nite, I spoke in mere idleness ;—the roads are in fine order for travelling I believe, and the weather is charming—for the Park.”

“ Your ladyship, I am to imply, has then no commands with which to favor me ?” said Nichols coldly and interrogatively.

“ None :—I prefer in all cases to avail myself of the good offices of a servant they are paid for their obedience.”

“ In that point at least I cannot presume to rival them ;” was the retort : “ I will not intrude farther—I have many arrangements which require attention ;” and he moved to leave the box.

Lord Somerville had hitherto stood aloof ; and if we may except a cool ‘ Your servant, sir’ to Harcourt, in perfect silence, but he now felt himself called upon to interfere : “ Nichols, my dear fellow ;” he said in his most bland tone, “ you positively shall not stir a step for these ten minutes to-come ; how ! —leave the house without one look at the

divine Taglioni? now, out on you for a Vandal!"

"I care not though she should never make another pirouette;" replied Nichols: "I am literally sick of all these fooleries—"

"Tell it not in Gath!" laughed Harcourt.

"I care not where it may be told;" pursued Nichols more composedly, for the voice of Frank had at once recalled his self-possession; "I never believed that I could enjoy the anticipation of simple, natural pleasures as I now do; I am literally sick of the hollow, artificial frivolities of London life."

"Sighing for green fields, shady groves, and nightingales;" sneered Lady Clara.

"Perhaps rather for cherry-lipped peasant girls;" drily remarked the earl, turning a stern look on his daughter.

"Possibly;" was the calm rejoinder of the lady, "nothing of that description would astonish me; our separate tastes are all born with us."

“ Really,” broke in the countess, apropos of nothing, as was usually the case with her remarks: “ I never witnessed so barefaced a flirtation as that between the handsome Count —— and the —— Ambassadors! She actually has no idea of tact!”

“ She is at least not singular in that deficiency;” said the earl.

“ Oh! certainly, he is quite as bad;” pursued Lady Blacksley pointing her lorgnette at the box of the lovely little Ambassador; “ I wonder that people can expose themselves to the remarks of a crowd! Were I the Ambassador——”

“ What then?” enquired Nichols in a tone sufficiently startling.

“ I would not suffer it;” resolutely followed up the countess.

“ Oh! believe me His Excellency has too much pride to wish to cage a truant bird, my good madam:” said her nephew, “ if she will fly, he is right not to fetter her by jesses.”

Harcourt looked in astonishment at the speaker, and their eyes met: for a moment Frank endeavoured to sustain the gaze without shrinking, but he failed; nor was his situation ameliorated by the uncomfortable consciousness that there was a deeper shade upon his brow than that which it had gained from the crimson drapery against which he leant.

Little more passed before the departure of the earl and his son-in-law: Harcourt, awkwardly affecting to distinguish a friend in the pit whom he particularly wished to meet, accompanied them in their retreat, and had the satisfaction of witnessing as cold a parting between the wedded pair as even his selfish nature could desire: he gave them ample time to leave the house, and then retraced his steps to Lady Clara's box, but it was vacant. He stood for a moment on the threshold lost in conjecture, and then perplexed, and infinitely more out of humour than became him, followed their example by an immediate retreat.

As he reached the door, he had the pleasure of seeing the carriage of Lady Clara Nichols just driving off; and throwing himself into his cabriolet, he put his horse to its speed, and soon alighted at his lodgings.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGNES was alone: Mrs. Wilkins attended by Miss Parsons had gone to visit a sick friend whose residence was distant from her own, and the gentle girl hailed with delight the prospect of a short period of solitude. For the first time since she had dwelt beneath the roof of her stern relative, a feeling of comparative happiness prompted her to resume the cherished task of completing an unartist-like but striking portrait of Eustace, which she had commenced in the humble home endeared to her by so many cherished recollections. With a smile upon her lips, and a soft light dancing in her eyes, she stationed

herself at her drawing-frame within a window recess of the breakfast-room; and as she plied her pencil she hummed to herself the simple ballad which he had loved the best. An hour had worn away thus—a happy hour; when the play of a warm breath upon her cheek startled her, and looking up, she almost shrieked as she met the eyes of Harcourt; instantly however, recovering her self-possession, she coldly curtsied to the intruder, and hastily lifting the portrait from the table, prepared to withdraw.

“Miss Davenel,” said Harcourt, as he placed himself in her path, and intercepted her retreat; “I feel that I have merited your displeasure: but if as a penitent offender I may claim forgiveness, believe me when I assure you that I deserve it.”

“Between strangers, sir,” coldly replied Agnes as she still attempted to quit the room, “there can be nothing to forgive.”

“Nay, by the gods, you leave me not thus!”

exclaimed Frank; "I have an infinity to ask of you, and to tell you—we *must* be friends—ay, and understand each other thoroughly,—Agnes,—yes, I mark your pretty start of scorn,—but still I say, *Agnes*, for both our sakes we must understand each other;—it is in my power to render your sojourn in this house a heaven or a hell—choose between them."

"Every thing must to me be equally indifferent with which your image is connected;" said the orphan bitterly: "your very sight is loathsome to me!"

"Ha! is it so!" and Frank laughed: "times will change, proud beauty—but be reasonable, Miss Davenel;" he continued, suddenly mastering his feeling: "be reasonable: you must have heard that I am about to marry, not *my* grandmother, but *yours*:" and he laughed again, though with a different expression: "no doubt you will tender your sincere good wishes on the occasion, and in sooth I am

likely to need them,—I give my hand, and in return my bride endows me with all her worldly goods,—yourself among the number:—need I say”—and the voice of Harcourt softened, as he clasped the hand which Agnes in vain endeavoured to release;—“need I say that of all which I may gain by my ill-assorted marriage, the privilege of looking upon, of listening to Agnes Davenel, will be to me by far the most precious? Recur not in thought, I entreat of you, to my madness at our last interview.—I knew not what I did;—astonishment at the bright, the unlooked-for vision of your beauty, deranged my senses—I was not master of myself—but now”——

“Having recovered them, you will I trust, sir, forbear to insult me by language as offensive as it is misplaced.”

“Insult you, Miss Davenel!” exclaimed Frank in the most approved accent of deprecatory horror; “you! who from the first moment in which I beheld you, I have never been

able to banish from my thoughts,—from my heart,—you”——

“This effrontery is insufferable;” said Agnes, as with a violent effort she disengaged her hand; “can you really imagine that I have forgotten the circumstances of that meeting to which you so unblushingly allude? No, sir, only with my life will perish the humiliating remembrance! First then, in justice to myself I command you instantly to desist from all farther annoyance of this description—and next, by the recollection of your position in this family, as you are a man”——

“My position in this family is that of your lover—your devoted, your adoring lover.”

“Shame, Mr. Harcourt!” said Agnes; “are you not the betrothed husband of Mrs. Wilkins?”

Frank laughed aloud with the most unblushing effrontery. “And what then, my pretty prude? did you never read the ballad in which it states that ‘lips though blooming

must still be fed?" That is my case, and as in the instance of your antiquarian thirtieth cousin I found that it was 'no song no supper,' I was e'en obliged to"—

"Now tenfold shame!" exclaimed the orphan, shaking back the long hair from her brow, and looking all her heart's scorn;—"now tenfold shame upon you! How, sir, were I to proclaim your vileness, would you look in the eyes of her whom you"—

"Spare your threats,"—said the unabashable Frank; "were you to tell her that I adore you, and see in her only a deluded and fantastical old woman,—were you, in short, to tell her the truth, she would neither listen nor believe—come, come; this is by no means german to the matter. You cannot ask me to love Mrs. Wilkins;—now, look at me—could you really find it in your heart to make such a request?"

"Really, sir,"—

"You would consider it impossible that I

should; and you are right;—no, Agnes,—this house has suddenly become to me a Hesperides—your odious guardian is but the dragon who watches the golden fruit—while you”—

“I can submit no longer to this intrusion, to this detention, sir:”—said the orphan, vainly renewing her efforts to escape.

“Insist! submit!” cried Harcourt lightly; “pretty words these, and full of meaning in some cases, but void of any in this: be wise as you are lovely, Agnes Davenel: I am ready to worship you—to obey your every wish—to hang upon your every look; pause ere you reject my homage, ere you turn my love to hate—my devotion to revenge. You despise my menaces? By heaven! you may live to repent your scorn. The world is a cold world, young lady—to such as you it is something worse;—one word, one gesture from me, may brand you with an infamy which tears nor protestations from your own lips can ever obliterate!”

"Just Providence!" gasped Agnes, as she sank shivering upon a chair.

"I would be your friend;" pursued Harcourt heartlessly: "but my friendship is not so valueless as to be given where it is met by scorn; it must be the growth of mutual kindness and confidence,—and I only ask of you, whether at this moment you are not in need of my good offices:—think you when I become the husband of Mrs. Wilkins, and you stand beside her at the altar, her acknowledged relative and inmate, that those who know me best will pass you by without remark or enquiry? Or, should you despise the ribald jests of a score of libertines, how do you imagine that the tale which I could tell would operate among the graver members of society? The story of our meeting—and the willingness with which you accepted the companionship and protection of a perfect stranger—of, in short," and he stooped, and raised from the ground

the drawing which in her agitation Agnes had suffered to fall from her hand: "the original of this portrait."

Agnes uttered a faint shriek, as she struggled to repossess herself of her treasure: "If you are a gentleman"—she commenced, but Harcourt had already deposited the drawing in his bosom, and the orphan again sank upon her seat, and burst into tears.

"I am sorry to deny you anything, Miss Davenel;" said Frank with affected seriousness; "but you have only yourself to blame—you have hitherto despised my power—yet I may still be conciliated. You see;" he continued, seating himself beside her; "that you cannot contend with me—come, now"—and, emboldened by her evident alarm and wretchedness, he threw his arm round her waist, while she sprang from him with all the energy of hate;—"this perversity will avail you nothing—you are in my power:—do not compel me by your scorn to make you *feel* it!"

Never had Agnes looked more beautiful than she did at the moment when Harcourt, in the mean triumph of his selfish nature, looked up to mark the effect of his words: her large eyes flashed, her cheeks were flushed with indignation, and her lip quivered with a contempt, which even amid her terror, she sought not to disguise. In his last effort at impertinence, Harcourt had quitted his original station; and after one withering look, Agnes profited by the circumstance, and rushed from the room.

“D——n!” muttered Frank between his clenched teeth, as the carriage of Mrs. Wilkins stopped at the door; and in five minutes more, he was smiling a false welcome, affirming that he had spent a solitary and tedious hour awaiting her return, and fooling to the top of her bent the too credulous benefactress who had sacrificed even common sense to his good looks and heartless flatteries; and who was about to trust to his honor and honesty the happiness

of her few remaining years. Amid his smiles and sighs Frank drew a mental contrast between the bright creature who had just fled from him with abhorrence, and the worn and withered woman who was now regarding him with looks of tenderness. And this then was the reward of all his anxieties, of all his exertions—it was a humiliating reflection; but as he had wrought, so he knew that he must bear—and he did bear it; for with bitter satisfaction he remembered that his victim was yet within his reach; and that ere long—but his reflections were hateful, and we will not pursue them.

CHAPTER XIV.

“AND so Nichols is really off, and alone;” said Lovell; “well, Mowbrey, I’ll bet you fifty to one that”——

“Pshaw! I know what you are going to say; but take my advice, and close the clasp of your pocket-book, for this man of the moon, this Harcourt, about whom nō one knows any thing, save that he has a plentiful stock of good looks and impudence, will not be so easily caught; eh, Lancaster?”

“Can’t say, ’pon honor.”

“Why, if the worst came to the worst”——

“A very gallant commencement truly!” laughed Lovell; “considering of whom we

are talking—and, really, with all due deference to your acknowledged good taste on such points, I must be permitted to remark that I do not consider this adventurer so *very* handsome—the man is well enough, certainly; but Stultz and Hoby have no inconsiderable share in making him what he is; as to the lady”——

“Not a word about her, ‘an you love me, Hal;’” murmured Lord Lancaster; “I hate all retrospection, and my liaison with Lady Clara always reminds me that at the same period I lost a front tooth—I detest recurring to personal misfortunes.”

“I can tell you a sufficiently singular fact;” said Neville; “which is no less than that Harcourt the day before yesterday received a very polite note from the Countess of Blacksley, intimating that Lady Clara Nichols begged to decline for the present the honor of his visits.”

“Well done, Lady Clara!” shouted Lovell.

"My *dear* fellow;" murmured Lord Lancaster in a tone of suffering; "do pray, for my sake, be a little more piano; your vocal explosions are really quite terrific."

"What can be the meaning of so extraordinary a prohibition?" asked Neville.

"'Tis said that 'conscience doth make cowards of us all;'" replied Lovell; "how it may be in this case, of course I cannot pretend to decide—there are rumours too, thanks to the lack of caution which made poor old gossiping Lady Blacksley a party in the arrangement, that Joseph Nichols has proved rather more insubordinate than his patrician bride had anticipated; and that however the inclination for expence may remain, the means are most fearfully curtailed."

"Lovell, you are yourself the very prince of gossips!" yawned Lord Lancaster; "what nerve you have! what an exertion of energy and animal strength this perpetual causerie must demand—you really merit to have been

a Frenchman—poor Lady Clara Nick—eh? what's the name of the individual?"

"Nichols;" emphasised Mowbrey.

"Vile cognomen!" drawled his lordship, suddenly becoming unusually voluble; "she should have had better taste—the thing is actually atrocious—roturier to the last degree—it never struck me before—but his uncle was a blacksmith, I believe."

"A goldsmith;" said Lovell.

"Ha! yes! a goldsmith—well, blacksmith or goldsmith, it is all the same—only a slight difference of colour—What an odious name is Smith." The noble lord had evidently talked himself into a mental confusion, and immediately became as taciturn as usual.

"What are the fellow's politics?" asked Mowbrey.

"Tory, of course;" sneered Lovell; "heard you ever of a parvenu who was a Whig? hyper-Tory—an out-and-outer, I would wager my bay to a bass-viol;—you forget also that

‘my father-in-law the earl’ was to be conciliated in all ways, and he is, as in duty bound, Tory-bred.”

“Have they ‘cut’ altogether?” enquired Neville.

“Can’t say: but if Lady Blacksley be allowed to interfere, the arrangement will be final I have no doubt; for I understand she now affects horror at the work of her own hands. She has lately taken as much pains to separate the fond couple as she originally did to bring them together.”


“There is nothing on earth which I hate like an old woman;” said Lovell; “a compound of memory and mischief; living on the vanities of the first, which cloud her mind like a November fog in London; and on the excitement of the last, by which she eludes the stagnation of grey hairs and the palsy. Women should always be either young or invisible, for although wine may improve by time, it is no friend to a pretty face; and I hold it

as a very proper arrangement that a man should be entitled to a divorce on the appearance of his wife's first grey hair."

And in the frivolous discussion which grew out of Lovell's ridiculous position, Lady Clara and her blighted hopes, Nichols and his desolated hearth, were forgotten. The disappointed husband, whose visions of a proud and happy home had faded away like the mists of morning; and the selfish and inconsiderate wife, whose narrow policy had drawn down the glittering fabric in ruins upon herself and him. Light jests, inferential sneers, and offensive speculations, were alike busy for awhile, and the names of Nichols and Lady Clara were familiar to every lip "as household words;" but after a time another tuft of thistle-down floated by on the breath of public comment, and superseded that which had so deeply engrossed the attention of the idle and the curious.

CHAPTER XV.

MEANWHILE, cheered by the countenance and assistance of Mr. Brockendon, animated by the hope of achieving a competence which would enable him to claim his promised bride, and happy in the consciousness of his own mental resources, Mortimer Eustace trod unweariedly the path of industry and perseverance. Already did he feel the blessedness of comparative independence; and, as he thought on Agnes, look forward with cheerful hope to the time when, with her smile to animate his exertions, he should yet win for himself a brighter fame, and a more certain dependence. But to this period of suspense he



was not fated : a friend, a father, now watched over his fortunes, with all the intensity of a sudden and overwhelming affection ; and with all a parent's anxiety, (for Mr. Brockendon, from the moment in which he learnt the relationship of Eustace to her who had been the idol of his youth and the dream of his later years, had considered him as a son;) he forbore to check the salutary exertions of his adopted child ; but when, in the overflowing gratitude of his heart, Eustace confided to his friend the story of his affection ; when he painted the beauty of Agnes, her modest grace, her gentle piety, the uncomplaining sweetness with which she had borne poverty and privation, the resolute propriety which had induced their parting, and the desolate solitude of her young spirit : when he drew from his bosom the one only letter which she had ever addressed to him, and placed it in the hands of Mr. Brockendon, then indeed was the caution of the old man overcome—the

last worldly feeling which had retained possession of his heart melted beneath the meek, unselfish sorrow of the orphan, and Eustace saw a tear start to the eye of his mis-called cynical companion.

“Mortimer,” exclaimed he, dashing off the moisture as if jealous that it should be remarked: “marry her—the poor child is unhappy; she makes no complaint, and I like her the better for it, but still, I say, she is unhappy;—she loves you, boy, you are blessed, too blessed;—none know so well the value of affection as those who have experienced its want; there is a home and a heart open to receive you and your pretty bride—a blighted heart, perhaps, and an humble home; but such as they are——”

“Merciful Providence! how have I deserved this?” said Eustace with deep emotion, as he seized the hand of his benefactor, and pressed it to his lips and to his heart.

“I will tell you, boy;—by awakening the

torpid energies and affections of age, by teaching an unbeliever that there is yet honor and principle left among his fellow-men, and above all—Eustace,” he continued with effort: “by being about to become a husband, to have your heart’s fondest visions realized, and by my means;—you can over-pay me all,—give me that miniature of your mother—it will but be a loan;—in a few years, perhaps months——”

“My dear, my best friend!” cried Eustace: “to you I cannot refuse even this,—take it, and with it”——

“Enough, enough,” interposed Mr. Brockendon, as he hurriedly concealed the portrait in his bosom; “we will talk of your future plans; I shall joy to see a bright smile, and to hear a light step in my peaceful home—and we will be as one family, Eustace; your own intellect and your wife’s beauty will be alike subject of pride to the old man to whom you will in your turn be as children; and you will bear with his weakness in consideration of his

love; come, come, my son, wear a brighter brow, or I shall suspect that you are inclined to negative my proposition."

"And it is even so, best, kindest of friends;" said Eustace with affectionate and grateful determination: "never, never, will your generous, your unmerited benevolence be absent from my memory; but, sir, I am a young man; Providence has bestowed on me health, and strength, and mental capabilities, which, properly exerted, will enable me to work my way through the world, and to maintain my independence; I cannot live upon even your charity."

"Spoken like her son!" exclaimed Mr. Brockendon triumphantly; "nor shall you need to do so, my brave boy. You are already beyond the charity of the whole world; I have settled upon you an income, which, moderate as it is, will yet free you from all pecuniary obligation. While I considered that you had but yourself to support, I for-

bore to tell you this, for I rejoiced to see you breast the difficulties of the world, and force a footing for yourself; but now when I know and feel that the happiness of another is involved; another, whose youth and beauty only serve to increase her helplessness, I bid you claim that which has become your own; release the cold-hearted relative of your Agnes from the inconvenience of her charge, and bring the loved one of your heart to the bosom of an old man who will cherish her for your sake, until he has learned to love her for her own."

It were idle to detail the reply of Eustace; he was indeed scarcely able to articulate one; his heart overflowed with happiness, and deep emotion is never wordy. He gazed upon his companion as on some good angel who had shed a sudden light upon his path, and spread around him a perpetual spring.

How glad, how glorious, were his feelings; how divested of every taint of worldliness and

care; like the summer sky, upon which no cloud has yet gathered, like the flower on which no sun has yet set, like the eye of childhood, as yet unconscious of a tear;—like all that is bright and blessed were the emotions of Eustace. Fearful and wonderful is our nature!—the sport of circumstance, the puppet of an ever-varying fortune;—now elevated by some lucky chance even to the skies, now prostrated by some evil influence alike in spirit and in hope, we are the creatures of destiny, wafted hither and thither like the thistle-down; and undulating beneath the breath of fortune like the impalpable web of the gossamer. Vain and visionary are our hopes, idle and unprofitable our pursuits, poor and paltry our ambition: we hope, we pursue, and we aspire; we win, we overtake, and we achieve; and having done this, having excited the envy of our equals, the anger of our superiors, and felt that on all which we have accomplished the indifference of the

world has cast its chill, we look back wondering and repining, marvelling that to achieve so little we should have risked so much ; and discontented, that having wrought unweariedly throughout a life of turmoil and restlessness, we should not have made a prouder progress ; and finally, having wept and sorrowed over the bitter fact, we bequeathe our hopes, our fears, and our ambition to those who succeed us. And this is life ! That life to which we cling, and whose elongation we are prompt to purchase by sacrifices, by concessions, and even by crime ! That mysterious and incomprehensible existence, to which, even amid its miseries, we are so wedded, that although shorn not only of its splendour, but even of its commonest attributes of comfort, we still adhere, as to something valued beyond all else ! That life, for whose preservation the coward yields himself up to scorn, the miser to poverty, the proud man to insignificance ; that life, which, crippled as it may be by sickness,

depressed by sorrow, and withered by treachery, we yet love beyond all earthly possessions! We look to life as to a boon, when suffering threatens to abridge its term; our very selfishness holds to it throughout every change of fortune: and yet how lavish are we of its best blessings, of its finest enjoyments, when they are bright and beautiful about us! In the first rush of youth, in the matured strength of manhood, in the haunts of pleasure and of passion, we peril it lightly: but when it really becomes comparatively valueless; when darkness descends upon the spirit, and weakness withers the frame, then do we set upon its duration a price at which reason revolts; when the palsied limb, and the enfeebled intellect tell too plainly the ruin of the goodly fabric, then it is that we weigh every hour of existence in a scale which we are ready to turn with the hoarded gain of a youth of toil! But perhaps it is better so: for arrogant and heartless, we too often attribute to

our own powers, the strength which we are bound to refer to a Higher Cause; and blindly glorify ourselves on that which is but lent to us for a time, to be withdrawn when a mightier one than ourselves shall so see fit—and assuredly no one weakness of our human nature more completely prostrates its vanity, than this wild, uncalculating clinging to a life whose limitation it is beyond our finite powers to rule. How wise are they, who enjoying every blessing as it is vouchsafed, learn betimes to bend to a will more mighty than their own; who, schooled in adversity, affix a true value to the gaud and glitter of the world, and after a youth of sobriety, pass an old age of reason. Such was Mr. Brockendon; though poverty, life's sorest, because most humiliating evil, had never laid its withering hand upon him, he had been bereft in heart—he had expended all its sympathies, its hopes, and its ambition, and like the desert which has been swept by the simoom, he had beheld a waste;—the world

had indeed smiled upon him, but there had been no peace within—he had shewn the gilded casket to the crowd, and they were ignorant that the gem was not still shrouded there. He had learnt to mistrust that world, but not to hate it—to look on life as a temporary trust, not as a permanent possession; and to make of the allurements of existence, enjoyments, but not idols. With Eustace, even schooled as he had been in sorrow and bereavement, all was yet bright and sunny: the future was an untasted paradise, the present a probationary struggle, the past a record of blended griefs and joys so massed and mingled by memory that it called forth as many smiles as sighs, and in its retrospect almost amounted to enjoyment.

How blessed a thing is hope! It has been called a cheat; but even if it be so, who would not still be cheated to his happiness? As fitly might we veil from our sight the sunshiny noon because we know that the gloom of midnight must succeed its splendour; or

refuse our admiration to the roses of spring from the knowledge that they will fade beneath the blight of a more chilly season. Bright-eyed, beaming hope! the playmate of childhood, the companion of youth, the cheerer of age—the one counteracting influence by which we overcome a host of evils—the direct boon of Providence. What were man without hope? Reason is the attribute which renders him superior to the brute creation—Hope is that which makes him more blessed! It is the rainbow, linking heaven and earth—and brightly and vividly were its colours now blended in the breast of Eustace. He was no longer an isolated wanderer; no longer a mere cipher in the sum total of humanity—he had an aim, a hope, a motive near and dear for the exertion of every energy; and the rush of joy was almost pain (so nearly are our mortal feelings allied the one to the other) with which he contemplated the bright and beaming future. And well might he be pardoned, for fair indeed

was that promised future—love, and friendship, and affluence, were all combined in its delicious anticipation—all to which he had looked forward as the reward of weary years of toil, was within his grasp;—a home, and that home the dwelling of the only friend who had stretched towards him a helping hand amid his struggles and his privations—a bride, and that bride the only one whom he had ever loved:—his brain whirled; his senses became confused—he felt as the dreamer feels when suddenly awakened from a fearful vision; doubtful still of the truth of his safety, and of his identity. But the kindly voice which aroused him from his reverie, the kindly eye which looked upon his emotion, soon wrought their soothing influence; and after a time he was enabled to talk calmly and collectedly with his benefactor—to shadow forth his plans and purposes, and to create within his breast a present heaven from the mere visions of future enjoyment.

“ And now;” said Mr. Brockendon at length;
“ I will leave you ; write without delay to Agnes: tell her that you are no longer orphans, and that a home of love awaits her—tell her—but surely happiness has unhinged my intellect,” pursued the old gentleman with a smile,
“ or I should not prompt a lover about to address his mistress !”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE idlers were correct: Lady Clara Nichols had indeed declined the visits of Harcourt, and she had resolutely deprived herself of a companionship from which she had derived gratification, because she was conscious that the feeling grew by what it fed on. Educated like herself for the present hour, aristocratic in his habits, and fastidious in his tastes, the young barrister was precisely the description of person calculated to attract the notice, and to excite the admiration of a volatile and by no means strong-minded woman. But although imprudent, Lady Clara was not guilty—hers had been the errors of vanity, not passion—and

when she declared without reserve that Harcourt was pétillant de graces, she felt that she had nothing further to advance in his favour. He was a creditable companion—he was a presentable acquaintance—he was a delightful dangler—she forgot that he was also an adventurer, a coxcomb, and a roué. And this is too generally the case in the world—a costly frame excuses a bad picture—and Frank was decidedly *for* the world; he had not a secret quality, not a mental attribute which would have won for him the consideration of a solitary individual: but what care the crowd for qualifications from which they can themselves derive neither gratification nor advantage? If the clock-case be gorgeous, what signifies it to the man who takes no heed of time, that the works are wanting? To Harcourt this figure was strikingly applicable—his was a costly case, but defective in its machinery: yet his savoir faire saved him with society; his talent was nugatory, but his tact rivalled that of a

woman: heartless and hollow, he had the power of appearing all sentiment and sincerity; unprincipled and selfish, the words honor and liberality were for ever upon his lips. Reader, are you so fortunate as not to number a Harcourt among your acquaintance?

The individual to whom, in her worldliness of spirit, Lady Clara had united herself, was the perfect antipodes of the young barrister: uncompromisingly upright, just, and sincere, he was a good man, but he was a bad tactician; warm-hearted and affectionate, he wanted grace to make even his best qualities *tell* with the more self-centred; and while many sneered at his solecisms in politeness, few, if any, gave him credit for his better attributes. You heard a "thrice-piled" fopling drawl out that "real-ly that Mis-ter Ni-chols was a ve-ry respec-table man; but, 'pon ho-nor, he was so ex-treme-ly gauche and ro-tu-ri-er;"—and that was all; for even to the unwilling acknowledgement of his worth there was always a neutral-

izing drawback; while his worthless associate Frank Harcourt, who was steeped in debt to the very lips, whose leading principle was deceit, and whose idol was self, was admitted to be a "fine fellow," and an "honorable fellow," and a "dashing fellow."—But how worse than vain it is to moralize on the inconsistencies of a surface-judging world!

Unfortunately both for herself and her husband, it was even thus that Lady Clara Nichols reasoned: she had been educated in a bad school, and had worshipped at a false shrine: she preferred fashion to principle, and a high carriage to a high character; and consequently, while she was morbidly alive to every minute dereliction from fine breeding of which Nichols might be guilty, she was altogether incompetent to the appreciation of his many noble qualities. What could be anticipated from such an union, save precisely that which had occurred? A civilly inferred disgust on both sides, coupled with contempt on the one, and

with disappointment on the other. For such feelings there is no alleviating principle like absence; but absence need not necessarily entail absolute "separation:" there is a quiet, concise, exclusive manner of making such an arrangement, infinitely less galling to the feelings of the lady and to the pride of the gentleman—Lady Clara had suggested, and Mr. Nichols had submitted: and thus, from a false feeling on her side, of weak and womanly resolution not to accommodate her tastes to those of the man whom she had married; and from a mild and mistaken one on his, not to compel his aristocratic help-mate to any measure to which she was averse; even thus had been accomplished a separation, which the gentleman, however passive he had been in the original arrangement, had vowed that were it once brought to bear, should be eternal. When, therefore, Lady Clara Nichols, on the departure of her husband for one of his estates, withdrew to the mansion of her aunt,

although she would not, even to herself admit the fact, it was as a widowed bride. Her only disappointment on taking this step was produced by the information of Lord Somerville, that Mr. Nichols, viewing the determination of his wife as equally causeless and unreasonable, had positively refused to allow her more than a thousand per annum during her period of voluntary divorce.

A thousand per annum! the Countess, almost in tears, declared it to be equivalent to genteel pauperism;—Lady Clara, transported somewhat out of herself, denounced it as the income of a first-rate soubrette;—and the Earl, with the causticity so peculiar to him, and so disagreeable to his daughter, maintained that it ought to be affluence to a woman who had not previously been mistress of a sous. Hateful reminiscence! Lady Clara had already proved that all her memories of that period of aristocratic beggary had been long since worn out. Had she not for the last few months

been as lavish in her expenditure as though she had been born expressly to become a great circulating medium? And then her bills—how were they to be liquidated? She thought of Maradin with a slight shudder—the odious Frenchwoman would absorb her first half year's income—and some of her hats had been hideous! She had positively been obliged to give them to Mademoiselle Imogène—then she glanced at Hamlet's—Heaven only knew what the unconscionable man would charge for setting her cameos, and for her brilliant bracelets, and for—it was horrid! So did the lady rapidly run over in her mind sundry little pecuniary entanglements; and when she closed the mental review at Howell's, she fairly fainted!

She had done Nichols injustice; for he had generously considered, that despite her expressed contempt for money, it was yet possible that her expenditure had exceeded her means; and with a generosity which even Lady

Clara could not fail to feel, he had commissioned the Earl to relieve his daughter from the whole of her embarrassments. But still, as Lady Clara declared with a pretty scorn, it was bad enough and shameful enough of Mr. Nichols to leave her with so wretched a provision. Be that as it may, the wife's written expostulation had as little effect on the obdurate husband, as the more specious father-in-law's arguments had originally produced; for the disabused citizen was at length quite convinced that he had paid a sufficiently high price for the honor and happiness of his aristocratic marriage.

Lady Clara is at present the belle ingenue of the Countess's coterie; changed in nothing, save that she has reverted to her original and economical modiste; that she patronizes muslins where she was wont to sport tissues; and is more attached to *écarté* and *vingt-un* than at any former period of her life.

The bachelor-husband is doing wonders on

his estate: he is planting, and building, and draining; drawing plans for lodges, and bridges, and conservatories; and reviving the good old English fashion of a full board and a free hall. Self-exiled from metropolitan follies, and from metropolitan exclusiveness, he originates where he used to copy, leads where he was wont to follow; and surrounded by his friends, his horses, and his hounds, looks back upon the events of his London life, as on a fit of the night-mare, which has left but one disagreeable result to remind him of its infliction—the annual payment of one thousand pounds!

Let no one hastily decide that this portion of our tale terminates abruptly; it is but too true to nature; and many are the marriages which have been even more warily contracted, but which have nevertheless produced precisely the same result. There is perhaps no one important action of life which is so lightly ventured as marriage. It is so much the fashion

to talk of it jestingly, to speculate upon it idly, and to contemplate it carelessly, that few, in taking the leap, consider the depth of the precipice; nor is this the worst evil: there is too frequently a species of intuitive and almost unconscious deception practised on either side; and thus when the ceremony has actually taken place, the newly-married pair scarcely recognize the identity of their chosen partners! The sun-kissed and waveless lake wakens into billows; the blushing and beauteous rose lends its poison to the venom-seeking spider;—the angel becomes a mortal, and the slave a tyrant. In adopting this position we naturally infer some species of sentiment on the one part and the other; some portion of that transient hallucination which clouds for a time the finest intellect, and enables every one to live for a short while in a voluntary fool's paradise, which after all is at least worth no inconsiderable enjoyment of what is commonly regarded as worldly wisdom.

The case is even worse where the union is merely one of calculation and convenience; where the most serious of all compacts is degraded into a mere system of barter; and the feeling of propriety and self-respect made subservient to a spirit of ambition or sordid interest. Nor is the delusion under which the opposite sex too frequently labour with regard to the female character less deeply to be deplored; they are so apt to draw false deductions from appearances, and to wrong in some cases as much as they over-value in others. The high-spirited and right-minded woman seldom suffers the crowd to penetrate into her finer feelings: her heart is a closed volume upon which one eye only is permitted to rest; while in every instance wherein that heart is concerned, she loses the elasticity of thought and the continuity of purpose which are so graceful in her sex. The coquette and the worldling are alike her victors in the social

arena, for they sail smoothly along in the trade-wind of establishment-hunting, unimpeded by the thousand feelings of self-depreciation and self-distrust which are the invariable attributes of a delicate and well-regulated mind. Men, even the most clear-sighted and the wisest, are perpetually guilty of errors in judgment where females are concerned; they mistake want of mind for modesty, tact for propriety of purpose, and worldly knowledge for sweetness of disposition; while on the other hand they imagine art where it has no existence, and fancy that they detect a hidden purpose in the simplest actions. They are dazzled by the flashing of the laboured metal whose polish serves to conceal its alloy, while the unworked ore is overlooked or disregarded. They are attracted by downcast eyes, monosyllabic answers, and deferential glances; and they seldom ask themselves if these be indeed the most pro-

mising attributes of companionship for the winter hearth.

Of the power of beauty it were idle to speak; it was a wise ordinance of nature that we should love to look upon the bright and the beautiful; and perhaps creation offers nothing more lovely than the fair face of woman. But—and here again how falsely are women estimated;—she who has courage to express opinions, and to give glimpses of powers, in the attainment of which she has passed many of the sunniest hours of her youth, and which have become the solace of her solitude, and the companions of her privacy; through whose means she is rendered comparatively independent of the frivolities and dissipation of the world, and can find unceasing occupation in her own home:—how is she judged? Every word, every look is analyzed, distorted, commented on—her simplest sentiments are woven into meanings of which nine times out of ten she is perfectly innocent; and she

moves amid the world's throng with a distinctly articulated identity which is never for a moment suffered to be overlooked or forgotten. And is not this unjust? Is not the exotic blossom, whose colours and fragrance have been drawn out by extraneous methods, whose culture has been carefully tended, and whose growth has been zealously watched, the first to wither under an east wind? And, in like manner, is not the mind which is awakened by thought, and study, and reflection, to a just appreciation of the finer and more noble qualities of our nature, the most fitted also to honour and to cherish them when found? —This is the first mistake.

The next affects the moral dignity of woman as well as her feelings; it is calculated not only to wither her youth, but to embitter her existence. Men, (we speak collectively, for the misconception is painfully general) appear to imagine that every married woman must necessarily become a toy or a tyrant! With

weak-minded women such may indeed be the case, for even a simpleton must have a species of distinctive character; but not thence should it be inferred that a companionable female would ever condescend to degenerate into the one, or degrade her better reason and falsify the feelings of her sex, by striving to become the other.

It has been said that women have no power over their married fate.—Surely this is a delusion! Good sense and good temper cannot be utterly powerless with any man; however anti-domestic his habits, or vitiated his tastes, the influence of a fond and feeling wife, like the dew of heaven, may be felt although unseen; patience and forbearance, a bright brow and a welcoming smile, are the strongest links which can bind man to his fireside; the struggle may be long—the process may be painful—but the reward is sure. “Woman’s love,” said one who knew well the truth of the aphorism which he advanced; “is more

than half gratitude"—in like manner the love of man is more than half generosity ; and they who give him the credit of a life-long rebellion against principle and good-feeling, are nine times out of ten guilty of a libel upon human nature.

That a weak-minded or an ill-principled woman may fail to reclaim a truant husband is but too certain ; in the first case she lacks the power, and in the second the sincerity necessary to the task ; but that a fond, and patient, and well-judging wife, whose pride, and happiness, and hope all centre in the man for whose sake she has, comparatively speaking, resigned the world, should she resolutely determine to devote herself to that high and holy duty ; that she should fail seems almost beyond belief ; and surely no one would willingly become a convert to so dark a creed !

If the Almighty indeed " created man in his own image," he cannot be all evil, and if

he be not all evil, he must be sensible of the value of the deep, absorbing, self-sacrificing love of woman ; of her perfect trust, her clinging tenderness, her life-long devotion. She may be too often the plaything of his youth, but let her at least be the friend of his manhood, the light of his fireside, the associate of his hours of retirement, the soother of his fatigues, the partner of his pleasures ; let her, in short, be that which when he seeks to win her to his home, he promises that she shall be ; let him treat her not only as the object of his love, but as a rational being ; let him bear with those weaknesses which are the characteristics of her sex, and cherish that gentleness which makes her very failings graceful ;—and Man, proud in his consciousness of strength, generous in his plenitude of power, and forbearing in his sense of authority, will make for himself a friend whom neither change of fortune, nor loss of health, nor even disgrace—bitter and blighting though it be, could ever shake ; a companion

in sorrow, a nurse in sickness,—in short, and let him pause ere he scoff at that which he must possess ere he can justly appreciate it—he will win the deep, undying, devoted love of woman!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE heart of Eustace quickened its pulsations as he reached the home of Agnes. He was about to look on her once more, and to detail to her the happy news at which, in his letter, he had only hinted. Who is insensible to the delight of becoming personally the harbinger of good tidings? Surely a being so coldly constituted is to be pitied. Not even to his pen would Eustace depute the pleasant task of telling *all* his happiness; and he had already pictured to himself the gentle smile and the glad tear of Agnes as she listened to the tale. His heart leapt joyously in his bosom, and the very sound of the brazen

knocker as it echoed beneath his hand, was music to his delighted ears !

When he reached the breakfast-room, he found himself in the presence of Mrs. Wilkins, and he was instantly conscious that she held in her hand the identical letter which on the previous day he had addressed to Agnes.

“ There must surely be some mistake, Mr. Smithson;” commenced the widow, as the servant, after having announced Eustace, closed the door of the apartment; “ I thought that I had requested a cessation of your visits.”

“ I am but too conscious of that fact, madam;” was the reply; “ but unforeseen and happy circumstances which you could not possibly have contemplated when you issued that mandate, have in some degree compelled me to disregard it; a friend——”

“ Yes, yes; I know to what you allude;” interposed his auditor; “ but surely you could not imagine that I should be so easily duped by a well-told tale of a generous friend, and a

second father, and an offered home;—young man, young man, you have much to answer for; Miss Davenel tells me that you are a writer; and consequently I suppose that so clumsy an invention as this letter cost you very little trouble. I have often heard that authors mix up truth and falsehood so constantly, that they themselves scarcely know the one from the other—but I have lived too long to be so easily deceived; and as I have been weak enough to burthen myself with the young person who has called forth this discussion, I consider it my duty not to allow her to render herself a beggar for the second time.”

“Madam,” said Eustace with modest firmness, “while a fear of poverty remained, I forbore to urge Miss Davenel to the risk of sharing in its miseries—I was too well tutored in the school of privation to wilfully subject one so dear to me to similar suffering: but now, when without being actually wealthy, I am unexpectedly possessed of a sufficiency to

secure her at least from want, I cannot but consider myself privileged to claim the performance of a promise made to me in the chamber of death, and subsequently repeated in the house of mourning."

"Pshaw!" broke in his auditor; "what are promises? and how can you expect me to give credence to so improbable a story? I have not lived until my present age to be cheated by such a tale; men do not now-a-days give away a couple of hundreds a-year quite so readily. Such incidents may do very well in a novel, where the hero bestows a purse upon every village ostler who holds his stirrup, and never becomes the poorer for his pains; but in real life, young man——"

"Such examples of disinterested generosity are rare I admit, madam; and I am consequently only the more grateful that I have met with such a friend."

"Well well, Mr. Smithson;" said the lady impatiently; "all this is very fine and roman-

tic, I dare say; but I cannot at present suffer Miss Davenel to leave my house; there are circumstances now in progress which render her residence here alike desirable and necessary to me."

Eustace looked as though he required farther explanation. Agnes had hitherto been an object of such undisguised indifference to her relative, that this sudden assumption of interest in her movements was as incomprehensible as it was unwelcome to her lover.

"I consider my situation with regard to Miss Davenel as one of extreme responsibility;" resumed the widow; "I am her last relative—her sole surviving connexion—some time hence I may be induced to think seriously of your proposal; and a friend shall then investigate the truth of your story—a competent friend, who will moreover have an interest in the welfare of Miss Davenel of which you cannot be aware."

"Whoever he may be, madam;" said Eu-

stace warmly, "I shall ever feel grateful to him for a kindly feeling towards Agnes, and shall gladly meet his scrutiny—but can you not, and will you not, madam, at least fix some definite period for the termination of my suspense?"

The widow simpered, and looked down; and had she been forty years younger, Eustace might possibly have rightly interpreted the pause which ensued: as it was however, he gazed in wonder, and only marvelled what so extraordinary a manner could be intended to infer.

"It is possible—barely possible, sir, that a week or two may suffice—at all events, leave your address, and should I find it expedient I will cause the enquiry to be made."

"Can I not be indulged with an interview with Miss Davenel, madam?"

"Miss Davenel is indisposed, sir."

"Indisposed, said you? Agnes indisposed?" exclaimed Eustace.

"At least indisposed to admit of any intrusion;" was the cold rejoinder; "I do not perceive to what advantage a love-sick conversation could tend; and you may see by the letter which I hold in my hand that I am equally averse to expose her to the reception of a billet doux; which, however well it may be worded, is by no means calculated to calm her mind, or to improve her understanding."

"Has not Miss Davenel received that letter? did you not, madam, read it at her own request?"

"I answer 'no' to both questions, young gentleman; but I who am her natural guardian have done both without seeking or requiring any permission so to do; and if I have been fortunate enough to make myself understood in our present interview, have also answered it. I permit no description of folly under my roof."

"This at least I did not anticipate;" said

Eustace indignantly. "Unhappy, persecuted Agnes!"

"What say you, sir?" demanded Mrs. Wilkins angrily; "beware in time—there is a conspiracy against me, and Miss Davenel shall answer for it!"

"I am silenced, madam; nay, I am penitent,—visit not upon Agnes the penalty of my intemperance,—I will wait patiently, un murmuringly, until you summon me to your presence, when every question which you may ask shall be answered, and every inquiry satisfied."

"You are wise in time, young man;" said the widow somewhat conciliated by his changed manner: "but all this must be entered into elsewhere—I will submit to no further intrusion;—and, mark me—do not delude yourself with the belief that Agnes Davenel will enrich you through my means—I will not give her a penny, sir,—not a penny;—my property shall never become the prey of an adventurer.—

I am more keen-sighted than you suspect, nor am I to be so readily duped;—I tell you distinctly, that not a pound of my money will ever be wasted in encouraging a foolish and romantic marriage.”

“I seek not anything from *you*, madam, save the hand of Miss Davenel,” replied Eustace composedly, “grant me but that, and I shall be the happiest of men.”

“I will send my friend to you shortly, Mr. Smithson;” said his imperturbable companion; “and as I chance at the present moment to be particularly engaged, perhaps you will oblige me by terminating your visit.”

Fearful of arousing her readily awakened ire, Eustace obeyed; and with a heavy heart did he quit the inhospitable dwelling of the widow. A cloud had fallen upon his spirit. The happiness which but an hour back he had fondly imagined to be already attained, was now uncertain; and as he entered his

solitary home, cheerless and desolate appeared every accustomed object;—in vain did he attempt to frame some system of conduct; his thoughts were bewildered, and his perceptions blunted, the reaction of feeling had been so violent: he could not study—he could not occupy himself with his literary duties—in short, for the first time amid all his trials, Eustace was wretched.

Far different was the widow's state of mind on the termination of the interview; delighted at her own talent in diplomacy, she was, on the disappearance of her visitor, unusually self-gratulatory and amiable. Nothing makes us so pleasant as a good opinion of ourselves; it is a feeling which the world cannot damp—we mistake its "dread laugh" for applause, and are more tolerant of the failings of others when we suspect ourselves to be superior to their weakness.

In this happy mood, Mrs. Wilkins rang the bell, and desired a servant to summon Miss

Davenel. "No, no," she murmured beneath her breath, as she transferred the letter of Eustace to her pocket: "had she received these two pages of nonsense, or had she been allowed an interview with their writer, (some low fellow, I am certain!) her thoughts would have been full of her own affairs, and she would not have paid proper attention to mine.—

Well, Agnes;" she continued, as the orphan entered the room: "now I have given you time to recover from your surprise at the intelligence of my marriage, I have sent for you to ask your advice on a variety of points, on all of which poor Parsons is totally inadequate to form an opinion.—Why, bless me, child! one would think I had told you of a death instead of a marriage—you look the very picture of misery."

"My looks scarcely belie me, madam;" was the reply: "I have spent the interval which you were considerate enough to allow me for reflection, in an endeavour to ascertain what

was my duty under these distressing circumstances."

"Distressing circumstances, Miss Davenel?"

"Suffer me to proceed;" said the orphan earnestly. "I have implored that I might be directed to a proper decision, and I trust that my prayer has been heard; madam,"—and in the intensity of her emotion Agnes threw herself on her knees beside the chair of her relative: "as you value your happiness, your respectability, do not marry this man!"

Mrs. Wilkins gasped for breath—she could not articulate a syllable.

"When your house became my home, and obedience to your will my duty;" pursued Agnes; "when you rescued me from poverty and privation, I resolved to be to you, should you permit it, as a child; until to-day no means have been afforded to me of doing so;—and now—with the probable prospect of your enduring displeasure—with the even more bitter

possibility of my own disgrace should my simple declaration be disbelieved, or distorted by the falsehood of a villain, I am ready to fulfil my voluntary self-compact——oh, madam, I entreat of you, for my sake, for your own, do not marry this man!"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins at length: "disgraceful woman! have you fallen in love with Mr. Harcourt?"

"Do you ask if *I* love Mr. Harcourt?" cried Agnes, springing from her knees, and looking haughtily down upon her companion: "welcome beggary, suffering, and death, rather than the love of such a libertine.—Yes, madam, I dare to repeat the word—I have applied it to this man before to-day, and when I had even less cause—yet bear with me, and ere you banish me from your house—ere you brand me with your displeasure, let me at least do my duty, and tell you all."

"Pray go on, pray go on, Miss Davenel;" said Mrs. Wilkins with the forced smile of

subdued agitation; "you have begun so well that I shall allow you to proceed, were it only to indulge you in so becoming an exhibition of temper."

"I thank you, madam, for the concession, let it arise from whatever motive:" replied the orphan making a violent effort at composure; "to tell my tale explicitly, I am necessitated to revert to that period of poverty, when my beloved and enfeebled grandmother was almost wholly dependent upon my humble exertions for support. Then, madam, I was compelled, however reluctantly, to venture alone into the streets of London to deliver my work to my employers; yet I had ever trusted to the modesty of my demeanour, and the meanness of my dress, for protection against impertinence; nor did I trust in vain, until the unhappy day when I encountered Mr. Harcourt: to him my helplessness was encouragement, my alarm, amusement; he made insulting comments—insulting proposals—in fine, ma-

dam;" concluded Agnes in a lower tone, as she buried her flushed face in her spread hands: "I was humbled to the dust, for I was compelled to accept the interference of a stranger to protect me from his impertinence."

"It is all true, my dear madam, perfectly true;" said Harcourt as he suddenly advanced into the room, and confronted the orphan; "I will not deny a tittle of the tale; let the fact that the lady was young, pretty, and alone, plead my apology. You, my kind friend, are too much a woman of the world not to know that 'such things are.'—From a feeling of compassion I had promised to Miss Davenel that I would guard her secret inviolate; but, since she has chosen to be thus far her own chronicler, she will perhaps permit me to terminate this 'most pleasant history.'—The stranger, my dear madam, whose interference was so singularly well-timed and acceptable, was young, and bold, and—in short"—continued Frank, placing in the hand of Mrs. Wilkins the por-

trait of which he had so dishonorably possessed himself: "he was the original of this sketch"——

"The very man!" exclaimed the widow with uplifted hands and eyes: "he has just left the house."

"Just left the house!" murmured Agnes in an accent of misery.

"Just left the house!" exclaimed Harcourt passionately; "Insolent varlet! nay then, in that case, the lady must have proved kinder than even *I* had thought!"

"Dastardly coward!" said the orphan: "now, at least, all delicacy towards you is at an end; I can even thank you for the insult:—madam"——

"Heed her not, my good friend;" cried Frank, as he moved towards the widow with more anxiety than a deliberate policy would have dictated: "she is transported by passion; and, indeed, after what has appeared,

is unworthy to occupy your attention, or to harass your feelings."

But Mrs. Wilkins, easy dupe as he had hitherto found her, yet possessed a fund of curiosity which overwhelmed for the time, her tardily-excited sensibilities: it may be also that certain misgivings began to cross her mind; or, (for the anomalies of the human character are beyond analysis,) a feeling of pity for the desolate young creature before her, awakened in her bosom the womanly gentleness which never can be wholly extinguished while one good impulse remains: be it however as it may, the sudden excitement of the scene had its charms for one whose life had hitherto been as a stagnant pool, unchecked by event or emotion.

"I will at least hear, my dear Harcourt:" she said peremptorily; "how much of the tale I may heed, is an after consideration;—proceed, Miss Davenel"—

“ I have little more to tell, madam;” resumed the orphan, as the rich blood once more mantled over brow and bosom; while, as she raised her eyes to the face of Harcourt, she smiled her contempt of the threat which his look conveyed; “ yet I hold it as my duty to inform you that, unworthy as he is of the affection and confidence with which you have honored him, he has dared to repeat his insults under your own roof; to tell me that while he gave his hand to you, he reserved his love for me!” Agnes ceased: blushing, and bowed by shame, she turned away: while Harcourt busied himself in endeavouring to persuade the widow that the tale was false: it had been difficult for an uninterested spectator to determine its effect on Mrs. Wilkins; she rose calmly and slowly from her chair: extended her hand to Harcourt, who pressed it to his lips; and then beckoning Agnes to follow her, silently quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE emotions of Harcourt during the prolonged absence of the widow and her protégée were decidedly the reverse of enviable. A thousand times he cursed—not his want of principle, but his want of tact: he felt that he was indeed doubly foiled, alike in his ambition and in his love; if the term love be not in reality profaned by its application to such a feeling as that which he had entertained towards the orphan. And yet, there was still a hope; he glanced at his irresistible person, and became reassured: his bride-elect could not resolve to dismiss him for so venial a fault. Was it not the most simple thing in the world for a man to admire a fine girl?—Was it not

equally a matter of course that he should tell her so?—And was not the individual who furnished him with the opportunity of so doing, the legitimate object of blame? What could be expected by an old woman of sixty who placed herself in juxtaposition with a beauty of nineteen? Ergo, Mrs. Wilkins was the culprit, and Mr. Frank Harcourt as innocent as light.

Delicious sophistry! — how ingenious is human error in its efforts at self extenuation! Were mankind but half as prompt and persevering in seeking apologies for the lapses of their neighbour as for their own, what a world of love and good fellowship should we live in; for assuredly we should all be faultless! What a ceaseless tide of conversation would be arrested when we had no longer the privilege of discussing our particular friends; what caustic wit, what piquant repartee, what admirable humour, would be lost to the world! But, *en revanche*, how would the sweet charities of life spring up around us like summer roses, shedding bloom and beauty over all the finest

impulses of our nature. How freely would heart meet heart, unchilled by suspicion, uncankered by hypocrisy,—how—but I am writing of Utopia in London;—I am weakly striving with my woman-hand to link the Antipodes;—and what is even worse, I have left Mr. Frank Harcourt to the unwelcome companionship of his own thoughts.

The widow at length returned; and, in her case it might be truly said that one short hour had done the work of years: even Harcourt, cold and callous as he was to the sufferings of others, started as she entered the apartment; and for the first time in his life was fairly at fault for words.

“I am come, young man:” she commenced in a tone as startling as her looks: “to tell you that, insulting, and unprincipled as your conduct towards myself has been, I forgive you: and what is even more difficult, I forgive you also that, by your agency, I have been weak enough to attach ridicule to my grey hairs; but for the destitute orphan be-

neath my roof—for the poor girl who was bequeathed to my care by one who was on her death-bed, and to whom I have so grudgingly supplied her loss ; for the insults which you have heaped upon her innocent head, I have no forgiveness ; the last hour has changed my nature : for your sake but yesterday, I would have resigned every comfort by which I am surrounded ; to have benefitted you I would have bereft myself ;—now, for your sake, I could almost hate my kind”——

“ My dear, dear friend !” commenced Frank pleadingly.

“ Not a word, sir,” was the stern reply : for the spirit of the widow, unsubdued as it had been throughout a long life by sorrow or constraint, now gave a temporary energy to her purpose which rendered her for a time unconscious of the pang at her heart : “ I have come to take a final leave of you ; to destroy in your presence every vestige of an infatuation at which I have learned to blush, ere it is yet too late to overthrow the last vision of

your narrow-minded and unfeeling policy;—this is my Will—I made it, not at your suggestion,—no, no,—you were too wily, too subtle, to remind me that your years of thralldom would be but few; but because—in short, sir, I had bequeathed to you all of which I had power to dispose,—and now”——

“Be not so rash, my dear, my best friend!” exclaimed Frank, seizing the hand which was about to deposit the precious document on the summit of a very fierce fire; “let me at least be heard ere you condemn me;—I have not deserved this from you; you are duped,—deceived”——

“Not now;” said the widow calmly; “that I have been both scarcely needed your admission; but now I am aware of my position;—release my hand, sir; if it be indeed my fate to make the fortune of a beggar, it shall at least be one of my own blood.”

Frank did release her hand, for the epithet which she had applied to him rang in his ears, and almost maddened him—had it

but been a man who thus dared!—He looked towards the pale and panting woman who had unconsciously suffered the parchment to fall from her hand upon the hearth-rug, and his passion passed away at once.

“And thus then we part:” he said with affected composure; “truly, the jest will be a pleasant one! And the tale of a light girl is to overthrow every promise, every prospect, every pledge”——

“Harcourt”—interposed the widow solemnly: “can you in honor lay your hand upon your heart, and tell me that—that—in short, that you offered yourself to me, regardless of the affluence by which through my means you would become possessed;—that for my own sake you sought to become my husband;—if you can indeed do this, then must the tale of Agnes be a false one, and the punishment shall fall where it is due.”

“On my honour, say you?” exclaimed Frank vehemently, as a renewed hope fluttered at his heart: “and did you, could you

doubt it? Now then indeed the moment is arrived, when I am privileged to upbraid;—you have injured me, my friend, — deeply, stingingly.” And the arch-hypocrite indeed looked the lie even as he uttered it.

“ This at least is balm to my wounded feelings;” said the widow; but she said it somewhat more coldly than her auditor approved: “ I will confess my weakness;—I had feared that it might be otherwise, and thus I shrank from confiding in you so fully and perfectly as I should have done; now, however, all cause of concealment is at an end; and to prove to you how completely I have faith in your assertion, based as it is upon your honour as a gentleman, and on your best feelings as a man, read that Will, dear Harcourt, and you will see that I had done all which I had power to do, to recompense you for an affection so disinterested and unhoped-for.”

“ My kind, my generous friend!” whispered Harcourt; “ do not ask me to look on any thing which is associated with the thought of

our eternal separation—the assurance of your affection, of your faith in me”——

“Nay, nay:” persisted Mrs. Wilkins: “for my sake as well as for your own, I earnestly request of you to run your eye over that parchment.”

Frank, with affected reluctance, obeyed: for a time his brow was smooth, and his parted lips appeared ready to wreath themselves into a smile; but suddenly he started, gnashed his teeth, and as the blood mounted to his hair-roots, flung the Will upon the carpet, exclaiming.—“What juggle is this, madam? Did you take me for an idiot, that I should sell myself to grey hairs and wrinkles for the wages of a mechanic? Knew you so little of me as to think that I could be caged so cheaply? or of yourself as to indulge in the infatuated belief that you could indeed be an object of love to any man? But I thank you that you have suffered me to look over the edge of the precipice—for that privilege at least I am indebted to you—Marry you thus!” and the callous, selfish

libertine laughed out his scorn, as he raised his dark eyes steadily to the face of the widow: "I would rather wear out my existence in a prison!"

What more he might have added in the paroxysm of his disappointment it were impossible to determine; for as the words left his lips, his insulted and heart-wrung auditor fell senseless at his feet. Frank rang the bell violently, and then seizing his hat, hurriedly left the widow to the care of her servants, and quitted the house. It was no fainting fit which had prostrated the energies of the unhappy old lady: for the last two or three hours she had been in a frightful state of excitement—she had alternately suffered doubt, and fear; had ventured to hope, and finally every good feeling of her nature had been cast back upon her: the struggle was too mighty for her years, and when the attendants laid her upon the nearest sofa, every eye detected the presence of paralysis. Fearful was the sight which awaited Agnes as she obeyed the hasty sum-

mons of a servant; her suffering relative was slowly recovering to a consciousness of her affliction, but the distorted features, the powerless limbs, all told a tale of fatal import. Assistance was promptly procured by the orders of the anxious orphan, who, amid her sorrow, yet preserved her usefulness; while the terror-stricken Miss Parsons stood by, wringing her hands in all the helplessness of uncontrolled dismay; and the loquacious and wondering servants were whispering their surmises and their suspicions; and combining, according to their several judgments, causes and effects.

Powerful stimulants restored the sufferer for awhile to the possession of her faculties, but she was fully conscious that her interval of mental strength would endure only a short time. She uttered no murmur; she did not even advert to the cause of her sudden indisposition; but summoning Agnes to her bedside, she talked long and earnestly with her; bewailed her want of greater affection, and besought her pardon for the sternness of her

unprovoked reproaches. Strangely does the approach of death soften the human heart! Conscious of its own lack of pardon, the sinking soul readily forgives—looking inward upon its own transgressions, it is anxious to shew mercy to those of others—and aware for how short a period it can possess the affection of its fellows, it clings only the more closely to the love by which it is surrounded. When she dismissed the weeping girl, Mrs. Wilkins was closeted for a considerable time with the panic-stricken Mr. Marsden, and a professional friend: the Will, which Agnes had been careful to secure, she had already restored to her, and had subsequently, at her desire, destroyed. The mental exertion proved however, too mighty for the exhausted frame, and a second paroxysm of the malady terminated on the morrow the sufferings of the orphan's last relative.

Once more Agnes looked on death; and death is ever awful, above all to the young. Once more she gazed upon the closed eye,

and the sealed lip; but not as she had last felt when bending over the departed, did she now feel. Her heart sank not; her spirit was not prostrated: her affections had been unchallenged; and though she looked with gratitude and kindness upon the friend whom she had lost, the more bitter pang of buried love was spared to her.

“Come to me:”—thus she wrote to Eustace:—“fearlessly, confidingly, I say to you, come to me, and support me under this new trial—I am alone:—when I last dwelt in the house of death, your gentleness robbed it of half its gloom: now, save in the instance of one who is still more wretched than myself; a helpless, hopeless, spirit-broken woman, the companion of my late relative, no voice, no look replies to mine; and I fear that I succeed but ill in the offices of consolation, while I have nothing beyond words to offer. Now it is, dear Eustace, that I feel in all its bitterness the impotence of poverty, for alas! I am powerless to assist. My only trust is in the last arrange-

ments of the dead—surely, the old and faithful companion of so many years cannot have been forgotten—Eustace! the warm blood has mounted to my brow, for I am about to speak of myself;—I have received your letter—that letter so long delayed in its delivery—so kind, so generous, so comforting to your poor Agnes; to tell you all the feelings to which it has given rise, even were it possible, would but profane them. Is not the hand of Providence apparent throughout all the events of my existence?—but for your noble, your disinterested affection, I tremble when I reflect on what must have been my fate. Now, however, a life of grateful devotion is before me—now, indeed, I shall awaken to a new existence—a gleam of light even at this moment breaks through the gloom by which I am surrounded; I think of your unfading affection, and I am happy.”

Splendid was the funeral cavalcade which attended the widow to her narrow home; there were plumes, and draperies, and hired mourn-

ers, and sable-coated friends, all anxious over-much as to the degree of estimation in which they had been individually held by the "amiable departed;" and there were many spectators; for this, the most hollow and meaningless of all human customs—the vainest mockery of all mortal observances, never fails to attract the idle and the vulgar: every pageant is to them a pastime, however sad its tendency: and there is a morbid gratification in looking upon "the pomp and circumstance" with which the poor clay that is so soon to banquet the worms, is conveyed to its last resting-place—there the plumes are cast away, the draperies thrown aside, the mourners dismissed;—the world, which has played its empty part even to the grave, yields up its share in the dead—and the crowd disperse, comment, hurry each to his avocation or amusement, and forget!

One invited guest failed at the funeral feast, and that one was Harcourt: he was no longer like the wind, an "unchartered libertine," free to come and to go; in vain Mr. Marsden en-

quired at his lodgings; the landlady grew from sullen to impertinent—in vain he sought him at the clubs which he had been accustomed to frequent—no where was he visible—his tailor, his bootmaker, and his job-master were alone able or willing to “prate of his whereabouts;” and, uncertain of their identity, to these individuals the worthy Marmaduke did not apply; though, as he very sagely remarked to Mr. Billington, “Ingratitude was the most heinous of all crimes; and a want of policy the most fatal of all deficiencies—Mr. Harcourt, whatever might be his feeling, should at least have kept up appearances.” The banker only groaned; for he remembered how expensive the intimacy of Frank had been to the widow; a fact to which his books bore ample testimony; and which, he had a shrewd idea, might in some degree, militate against his own interest.

But if an expected guest were indeed absent, an unexpected one to the man of business supplied his place; for when the mourners returned

from the grave-side to Baker Street, and proceeded to the library to be present at the reading of the Will, they found a stranger associated with Miss Davenel and the spirit-bowed Miss Parsons: it was Eustace; who at once candidly and manfully explained his position, and the consequent reason of his appearance in the circle; the claim was instantly admitted, for it was generally believed, that, as the nearest of kin, Agnes must inherit the bulk of the deceased's property: two individuals of the party were however better informed upon the subject, and the well-meaning but weak-minded Mr. Marsden, as he contemplated the meek placidity of the orphan, pitied her in his secret heart, as he attributed her look of gentle and patient endurance to the brilliant delusion under which he did not doubt that she was even then labouring; while the man of law, who was yet a bachelor, was gazing earnestly in the fair face opposite to him, and thinking how he might have been induced to commit his interests had he not known the truth.

“There is a Providence that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may”—and never was the truth of the axiom more apparent than on this occasion. The Will was a most perfect instrument; for Mr. Latitat had himself an interest therein; and, moreover, had never throughout life been guilty of a flaw:—there were sundry legacies—to Marmaduke Marsden, Esq. for a mourning ring, five hundred pounds; the same sum to Miss Parsons, to Mr. Billington, and to Mr. Latitat for his efficient professional exertions; one thousand pounds to her beloved relative Agnes Davenel—here the lawyer glanced towards the orphan, and was startled by the expression of deep and unequivocal gratitude which overspread her pale countenance; while his other listeners started with surprise, and became all ear—a few words sufficed to render the astonishment still greater; for the next sentence bequeathed all other personal and funded, as well as landed property, to Mortimer Eustace, the only son of Edward Eustace of —— the

beloved second cousin of the testatrix, and to his heirs for ever! A faint exclamation of joy escaped the quivering lips of Agnes, as her lover started to his feet: and great was the wonder of the party when they became convinced of the identity of the wealthy heir of Mrs. Wilkins, with the despised and insulted Mr. Smithson, of whom they had severally heard from the indignant widow. Congratulations and questionings poured in upon him, to which he replied with effort; for his heart was full of Agnes, his beloved Agnes, who would now share with him a home of affluence, and of the friend without whom it would seem shorn of a portion of its happiness.

Poor Miss Parsons! how Eustace blessed her, when thoroughly exhausted by the revulsion of feeling which the assurance of her own continued comfort had occasioned, and relieved by the departure of the guests from all necessity for further exertion, she fell fast asleep in an easy chair beside the fire, and left him free to commune with Agnes on his extraordinary

and startling change of fortune. All upon which he now looked was his own—of the very house from which he had so lately been dismissed, he was the master; and where he had striven in vain to obtain a hearing but a few days back, his nod had suddenly become a law.

“Is it not wonderful, my own Agnes?” he asked; “looks it not like the effect of magic? I seem as though I must be moving in a dream.—And this then was the proud relative who spurned my father’s poverty, and treated his every necessity as a crime.—Strange! most strange! What a lesson will this be to us, Agnes, of the futility, the emptiness of human vanity:—What puppets are we in the hands of Providence!—When we blindly imagine that we are following the dictates of our own free and unfettered will, we are in truth but working out the ends of a Mightier Power than ourselves, and teaching a great moral lesson to the world.—And now”—

“And now, dear Eustace;” interposed Agnes with a fond smile; “Miss Parsons is

awaking from her sleep, and will be glad to seek a more commodious resting-place,—therefore, despite the excellence of your arguments, and the extent of your new authority in this house, you must e'en submit to a second dismissal, and depart."

"Farewell then for to-night:" murmured Eustace: "to-morrow, Agnes—what do I not hope for to-morrow?—a long, long day beside you, with my good friend near us, full of happy thoughts and bright fancies.—Did I not tell you that the world owed us many years of enjoyment? and are they not now before us?—the debt will be paid—farewell then, Agnes—think of me ere you sleep that I may be in your dreams, and—good night."

"And is this really all true, Miss Davenel?" asked her companion, aroused by the closing of the door, and involuntarily giving utterance to her waking thought; "how very strange to be sure! And am I actually to live in your house? how happy I shall be!"

"I sincerely trust that you will be as happy

as you deserve:" smiled the orphan: "your attachment to your departed friend has entitled you to the protection of her successors, and rely on it that it will never fail you."

"Heaven reward you!" said the guileless Miss Parsons; "I am sure that I will do all that lies in my power to prove my gratitude.—What a charming young man is that Mr. —, the gentleman with the two names, I mean! so much handsomer and more amiable than Mr. Harcourt! How happy you will be! And so fine-looking a couple! Dear, if poor Mrs. Wilkins could look up from her grave, how surprised she would be to find that Mr. Smithson was not Mr. Smithson—but that he was really Mr. Eustace —. Very extraordinary, to be sure, and all so unexpected! What should I have done had you not been so kind as to offer a home to my grey hairs; I might have tried to do something for myself with poor, dear Mrs. Wilkins's legacy, you will say: but you may believe how very impossible it is, Miss Davenel, to commence life anew at sixty."

CHAPTER XIX.

How prone are we, each and all, to murmur at our respective destiny, and to believe that we have been singled out by misfortune from the world's throng! How apt are we to hold the miseries of others lightly, and to exaggerate the measure of our own! How wilfully do we shut our eyes to the brightening of our fortunes, and keep our gaze fixed upon the retreating clouds which have passed over us! Nor do we remember to acknowledge how vastly the sum of our suffering has been augmented by our own agency; by our own imprudence, or supineness, or want of fortitude. We are content to murmur, and to condemn,

and to despair; and the best energies of our nature become stagnant, from a want of that mental exertion without which we cannot hope to secure our footing in the paths of a world, where the resolute and the sturdy are ever ready to thrust aside the timid and the infirm of purpose. However weak our conduct may have been, however defective our calculations, or faulty our principles, we invariably revenge ourselves on fate, by ascribing to our unlucky stars every evil which may overtake us in our career.

Thus did Harcourt console himself, if consolation it could be called, when the gates of a prison closed behind him, and he saw that the evil which he had long dreaded had at length overtaken him. On reviewing the events of the past year, he cast all the onus of his ill fate upon the innocent Agnes, the unsuspecting Eustace, and the deluded Mrs. Wilkins; his own narrow-minded and heartless policy, his own uncompromising and hateful

selfishness, were overlooked in the retrospect; and he only pictured to himself how differently his speculation might have terminated, had the excellence of his arrangements been unfettered by these counteracting influences. Frank however was not of a despairing temperament; and while the society of the Bench offered such choice and desirable associates as Captain —, my Lord T—, and Sir E—, all good men and true, who had fretted their hour on the turf and at the gaming table, there was no risk of stagnation: and after all, liberty is merely ideal: a chimera, in pursuit of which mankind exhaust alike their fortunes and their lives, and which few, if any, ever secure. And accordingly Mr. Frank Harcourt renewed his acquaintance with a score of "capital fellows," who had been "dashing men about town," and was soon deep in the mysteries of hazard, rouge et noir, and roulette. He was still possessed of a few loose pounds; and it is a merciful ordinance of cus-

tom that the incarcerated debtor shall not be cut off at once from the means of indulgence in those menus plaisirs which have been the cause of his incarceration; but that be his debts as weighty as they may, and his creditors as needy as they please, he is still at liberty to dispose as he sees fit of the wreck of his broken fortunes.

Harcourt was by no means a person likely to neglect such a privilege; and he had a trifling knowledge of some rather intricate principles of gaming, which gave him distant glimpses of renewed independence. Hope, degraded into a decoy, beckoned him onward under the guise of a leading card, or a winning die; nor was he slow to obey her bidding. But Hope, perverted from her original and more worthy purpose, loses her blessedness, and wiles only to betray; and even thus did she delude the infatuated Harcourt: worldly-wise as he was, there were competitors in the race of cunning domesticated in his present

locality, to whom he was by no means equal either in guile or in experience, crafty as he believed himself to be. This truth was soon most unpleasantly forced upon him; and the bitter conviction came with it, that his I O U would here be nothing better than waste paper. His thoughts reverted to Lady Clara; surely with the feelings which she had evinced towards him, she could never calmly contemplate the utter subversion of all his bright visions, the overthrow of his anticipated fortunes;—the struggle was nevertheless a bitter one with which he compelled himself to the humiliating prostration of his palmy pride, and the exposure of his grovelling and mundane necessities—he might have spared himself the pang; for Lady Clara, instantly recognizing the well-known character, like a wise and prudent woman, who had bought her wisdom and her prudence at too high a price to lightly peril either, returned the letter unopened, with a cool announcement, formally inscribed in the

envelope, that her ladyship declined all further correspondence with Mr. Harcourt, to whom she accordingly begged leave to restore the letter which he had been polite enough to address to her.

This was the last straw floating on the surface of his fortunes; for he had taken immediate steps to ascertain whether "his widow" had exhibited any relenting towards him since their late interview, which he discovered had also been their final one. Had Frank contemplated his position without self-disguise or self-bias, he would at once have felt himself to be a moral murderer; but he was too essentially selfish for such mental speculations, and his necessities were so multitudinous and so multifarious, and his means of gratifying those necessities so utterly exhausted, that he had not a thought to waste upon mere theoretical miseries. But it were idle to trace to its close the career of a ruined gamester and a baffled libertine; to follow through all its sinuosities

the expiring and impotent effort of a world-worn and worthless nature, and to add another item to the already crowded catalogue of crime. Suffice it that Harcourt still exists; still moves among the unfortunate and the abandoned; and, true to his vocation, still strives to dupe, when the occasion offers, some less experienced spirit than his own; or becomes in turn the prey of superior cunning; still does he look down with contempt on the humbly honest, and the obscurely honorable; and glorify himself upon those passages in his early history, which have clouded his latter years with disgrace and disappointment. A type of faded fashion, of perverted powers, and of the folly which would erect a superstructure of happiness ere it had laid a foundation of principle, the self-deceived and self-ruined Harcourt, is, even amid the dissolute and the thoughtless, pointed at as an example of empty pretension and idle self-appreciation—a man of words and sophistries—a creature

combined of cunning, casuistry, and caution; suspicious of his fellow-men, and almost of himself—a degenerated dandy—a spirit-bowed and spirit-weakened victim to his own heartlessness, and want of straight-forward honesty of speech and purpose.

How beautiful is truth! how plain, how peaceful are her paths! lighting up the human character as the sunbeam illumines the heavens, and shedding around her the germinating principle of virtue! *Splendide mendax* might have been the motto of Harcourt, as it was the brief chronicle of his career. He had commenced existence as a living lie; and the result of years of miserable chicane and deception had been precisely such as might have been anticipated.

It is a relief to turn to the contemplation of virtue and happiness; and to revert to the small but grateful circle, which on the morning subsequent to the widow's interment, met in the drawing-room in Baker Street. The sur-

prise of Mr. Brockendon, when he learnt from the lips of Eustace the unlooked-for change in his fortunes, may be imagined. That one, apparently so friendless, so utterly dependent upon his own exertions for support, should suddenly find himself possessed of affluence, was so startling a fact, that it was not until the wary old gentleman had listened to all the details of the affair, and made himself master of every circumstance connected with the bequest, that he could be convinced that it had not originated in some mistake which might yet prove fatal to the hopes of his young friend.

How hard does it appear to the young and the sanguine when they are called upon to combat the caution of the more mature and suspicious: how difficult do they find it to fold the wings of their enthusiasm, and to forego the wild flights of their obstacle-spurning imagination. Eustace wondered at the pertinacity with which the old gentleman pursued his enquiries, but he satisfied them with respectful

and ready forbearance; and only ventured at intervals to remind him that he had not yet been introduced to Agnes, and that she was anxiously expecting them.

“ Ay! ay!” said Mr. Brockendon; “ natural enough—and you are as anxious not to disappoint her. Poor child! her troubles are over, I trust; at least she will never suffer again from unkindness. Have a care, Eustace, the world is now bright before you, and its temptations are many; sudden revulsions of fortune sometimes turn the wisest heads; and in truth you might almost be excused should you for awhile be tempted to overlook your own identity; but remember, my son, that the happiness of this young and gentle girl is hinged upon your own; and that you are responsible for it in the eyes of Providence. You have indeed found gold in the mine, and water in the rock — neither dive nor drink too deeply, lest you exhaust both the one and the other;—and now”—continued the old

gentleman, as he resumed his hat and gloves :
“ now for the meeting with my adopted daughter.”

Happy, if not joyous was that meeting ; predisposed to value and to admire the gentle orphan, Mr. Brockendon folded her to his heart, and breathed out a fervent blessing alike on her and on Eustace ; prepared to respect and to cherish the benefactor of her affianced husband, Agnes, blushing with blended timidity and gratification, shrank not from the warmth of his salutation ; and for a moment the delighted old man forgot her beauty in the affectionate respect with which she greeted him ; but after a time he seated himself beside her, and listened to her low sweet voice, and looked into her loving eyes, and wondered no longer that Providence had visited so fair a being with unlooked-for blessings. Her pure and pensive beauty, — the calm contemplative character of her young brow, over which care had swept, but on

which it had forborne to leave more than its faintest trace—the meek, confiding happiness of her smile—all combined to attract the eye of Mr. Brockendon, and to appeal thence to his heart. He wondered no longer at the deep and steady attachment of Eustace; for he felt that no earthly benefit could have compensated the forfeiture of such an affection as shone in those dark eyes, and awoke to music from those parted lips! Reminiscences of his early youth—of his own blighted hopes, and withered prospects, passed over the spirit of the old man, as he sat with the hand of the fair girl within his own; memories over whose sunniest spots there still hovered a gloom which years had failed to remove—upon whose records there rested a shadow which time could not sweep away.

Thus is it ever with poor human nature;—its happiest moods are dimmed by a regretful tear, its fairest promises carry a blight even amid their bloom. Like a wounded bird, when it strives to soar in air, its weakened

wing fails in part to perform its office, and the flutter of conscious infirmity arrests the vigour of its flight.

The only spirit which did not either wander into the future or fall back upon the past, was that of Miss Parsons. To her the present was all in all; she had the snuggest seat at the fire-side; the most comfortable corner on the sofa; if she spoke, she was not only listened to, but answered; if she left the room, she was never taught to feel on her return that she had entered at an unwelcome moment. She was permitted to have feelings, and preferences, and opinions; and this fact alone, to one who had, during the lapse of seventeen weary years, been compelled to degenerate into a piece of human machinery, was of itself no inconsiderable privilege. The weakness of her head was overlooked in the goodness of her heart; and in short, as Miss Parsons herself expressed it, "it was very pleasant after being nobody all one's life, to become somebody in one's old age."

And Miss Parsons was right: there is an elasticity in the human character which causes it to rebound when the yoke of tyranny and oppression is removed, though never so tardily; and a smothered fire in the recesses of the human heart, which however carefully it may have been smothered for years, will yet flash forth when it is left free to shed its genial influence on those who have awoke it into existence. There is no mistake more fatal than that which supposes any being, however low in the scale of intellect, or however bowed by adventitious circumstances, to be incapable of kindly impulses and pure affections. Hath not the otherwise inhospitable desert its ground-spring?—the weary waste of blank and barren sand its smiling oasis?—And is it not even thus with the human heart? The sparkling waters may gush forth as freely in more beautiful and bowery places; the majestic forest-trees may stretch their welcoming branches over fairer and grassier spots; but neither the one nor the other becomes more

valuable from its improved locality: and in like manner, although the gentler impulses of our nature may appear more attractive when combined with those higher and nobler attributes with which they seem formed to be associated, they are not the less estimable of themselves when they emanate from a more limited intellect or a less prepossessing exterior.

This truth was demonstrated in the case of Miss Parsons; her ready good nature, and her never-failing good intentions, were serviceable as well as pleasurable to Agnes, whose peculiar position entailed an unusually constant necessity for their exertion. The extreme youth, the constitutional timidity, and the pre-occupied mind of the orphan, rendered the superintendence and good offices of the more prescient and pains-taking old lady highly valuable; for, be our imagination as exalted, and our aspirations as lofty as they may, the world and its thousand details yet put forward a claim which we should in vain affect to disregard; and which prove too

plainly that the *aut Cæsar aut nullus* system is utterly inconsistent with the exacting routine of an every-day existence.

Thus did worthy Miss Parsons work out for herself by the very strength of her singleness of heart and simplicity of purpose, an importance in the eyes of the less world-accustomed Agnes, which gradually restored her to a sense of self-respect and self-appreciation; and thus did she rivet the last link of the new and welcome bond between them.

To Eustace, meanwhile, the dawning of each succeeding day offered only a renewal of happiness; with that respectful regard for the feelings and comfort of Agnes which rendered him so dear in her eyes, and so estimable in those of others, he exiled himself from her presence save when he was accompanied by his adopted father; and it was in his humble lodging, where we first introduced him to the reader, friendless, and almost penniless, that he awaited, uncomplainingly at least, if not patiently, the termination of the brief period

of mourning, at whose cessation he was to claim the hand of Agnes. But how different were now the musings of his solitude!—how gay and golden the visions in which he indulged without a fear of disappointment; and how light the labours which he had not yet relinquished; and when at length the day so long anticipated indeed arrived, with how grateful, how happy, and how sincere a heart did he utter those vows by which he bound himself to cherish throughout existence her whom he had so long loved; and receive from the hands of his first friend the wife of his young affections. The worthy Mr. Brockendon wept as he stood beside them at the altar, but the tears which he shed were happy ones, warm from the heart; while poor Miss Parsons sobbed aloud, as it seemed through sympathy, for there was a smile upon her lips which negatived all suspicion of sorrow. Of Agnes it is almost needless to speak. She shed no tear, she did not even breathe a sigh; and if there was a slight gravity on her young

brow, and an unwonted pallor on her cheek, yet her voice was firm as she plighted her faith, although it was so low that Eustace bent his ear to catch the words as she uttered them. But when she was once more beneath the roof of her destined home, and that she knelt before the kind old man by the side of her new-made husband, while with convulsive energy he blessed them as the aged only can bless, then indeed the tears burst forth, and she wept out her happiness on the bosom of her enraptured bridegroom; who, as he folded her to his heart, forgot his sudden affluence, his worldly wealth, and remembered only that the day-dream of his existence was at length realized; that his probationary period of doubt and sorrow was overpast, and that he was indeed the husband of the fair and gentle Agnes!

THE END.

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